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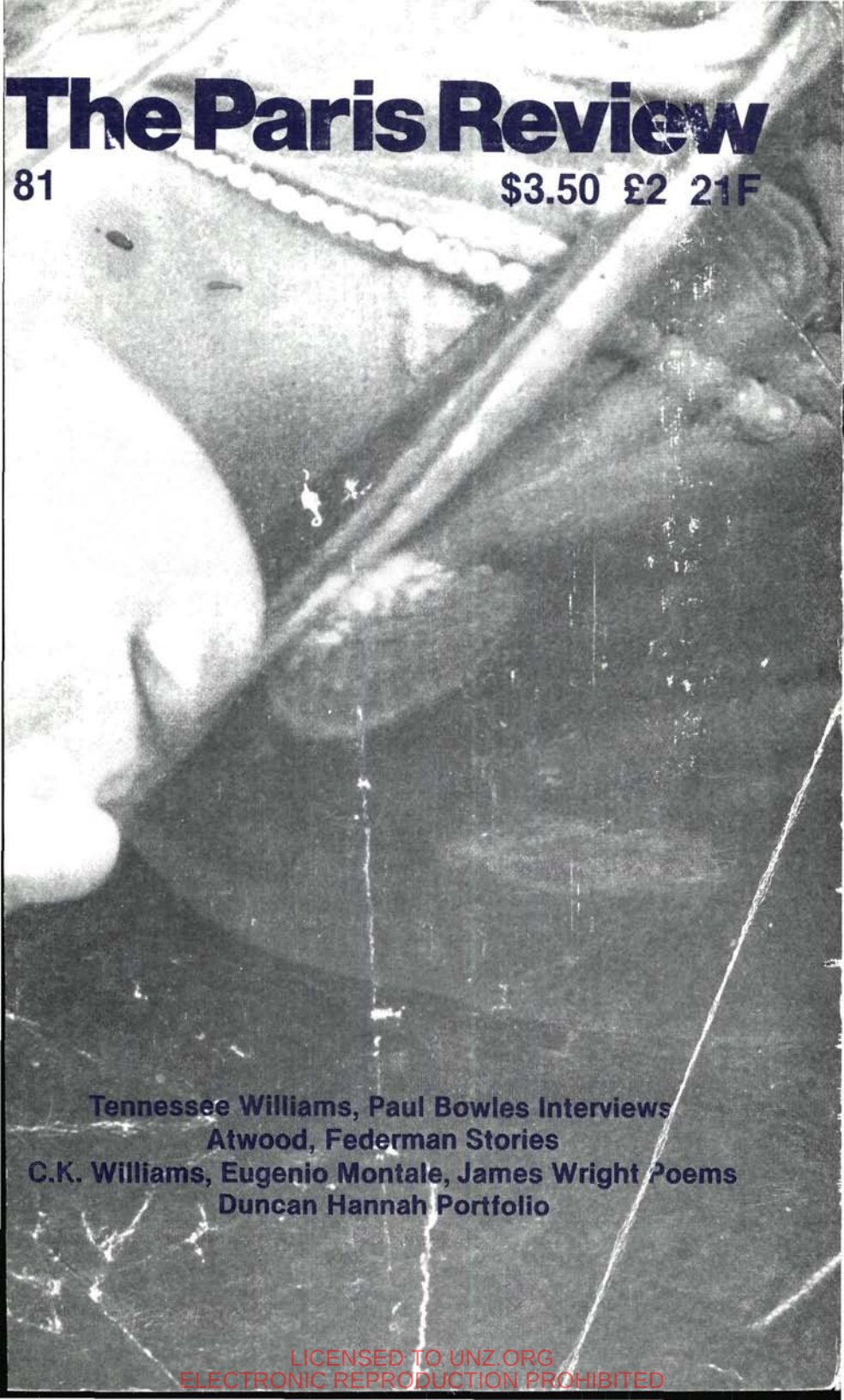

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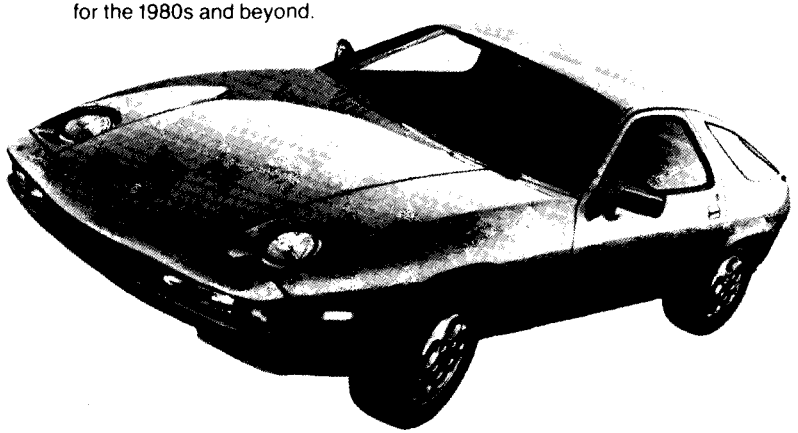

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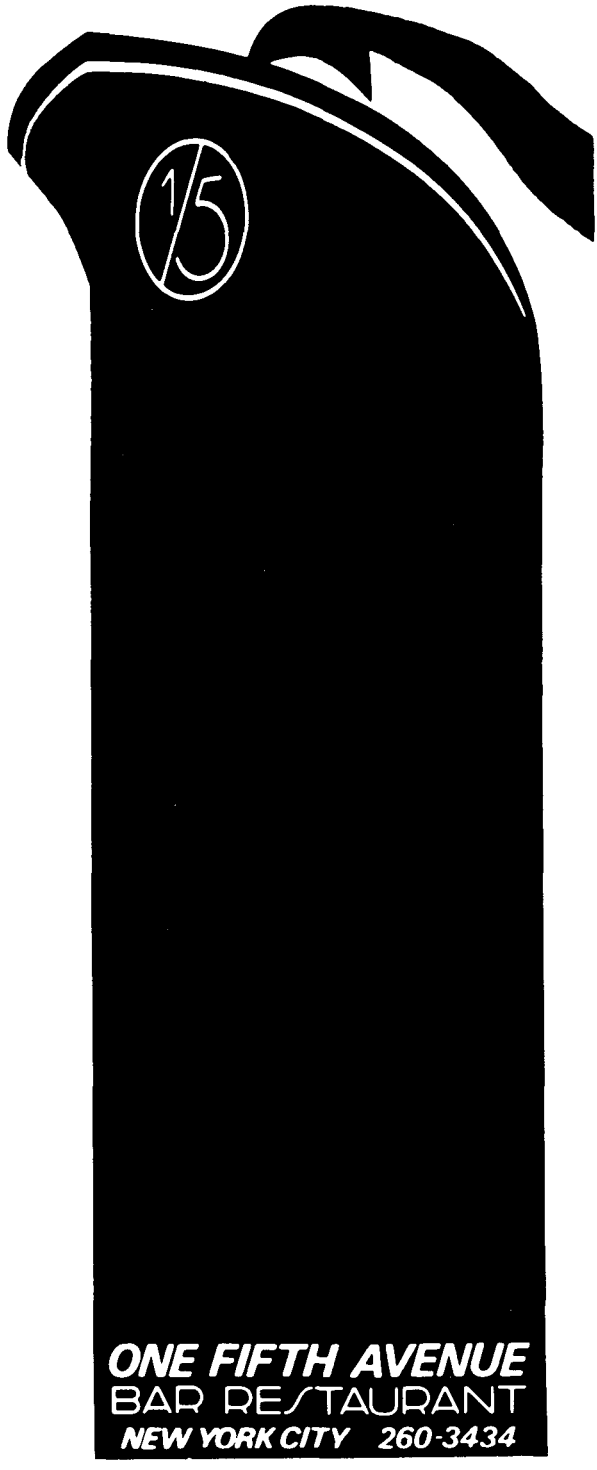

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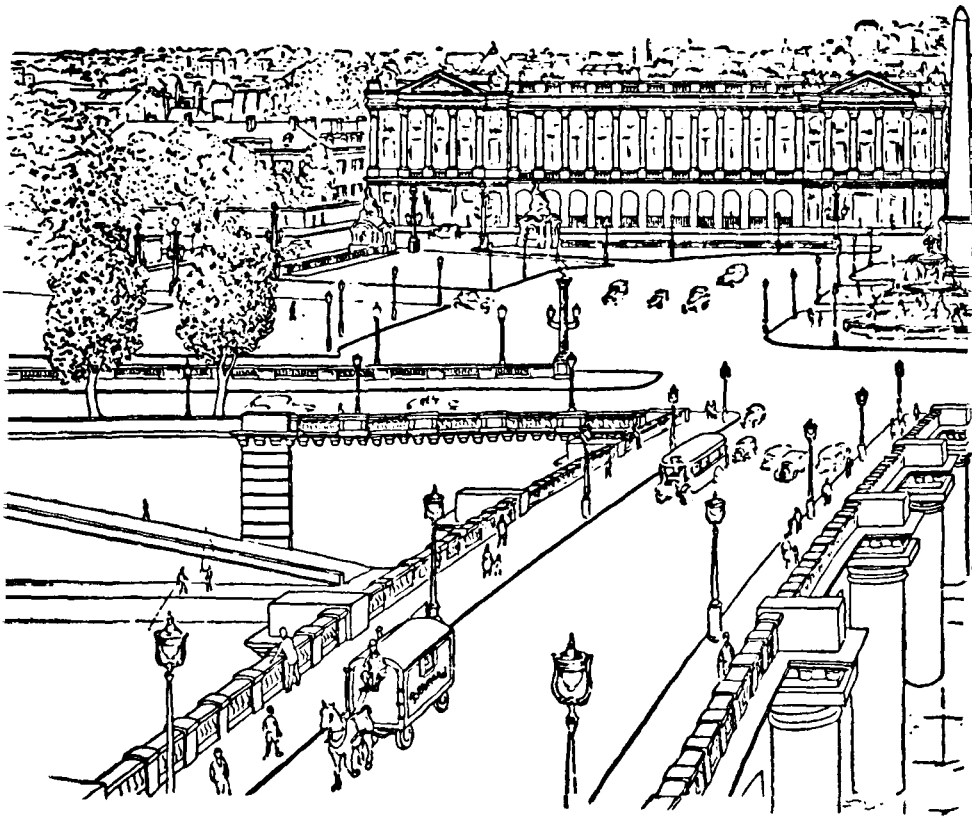

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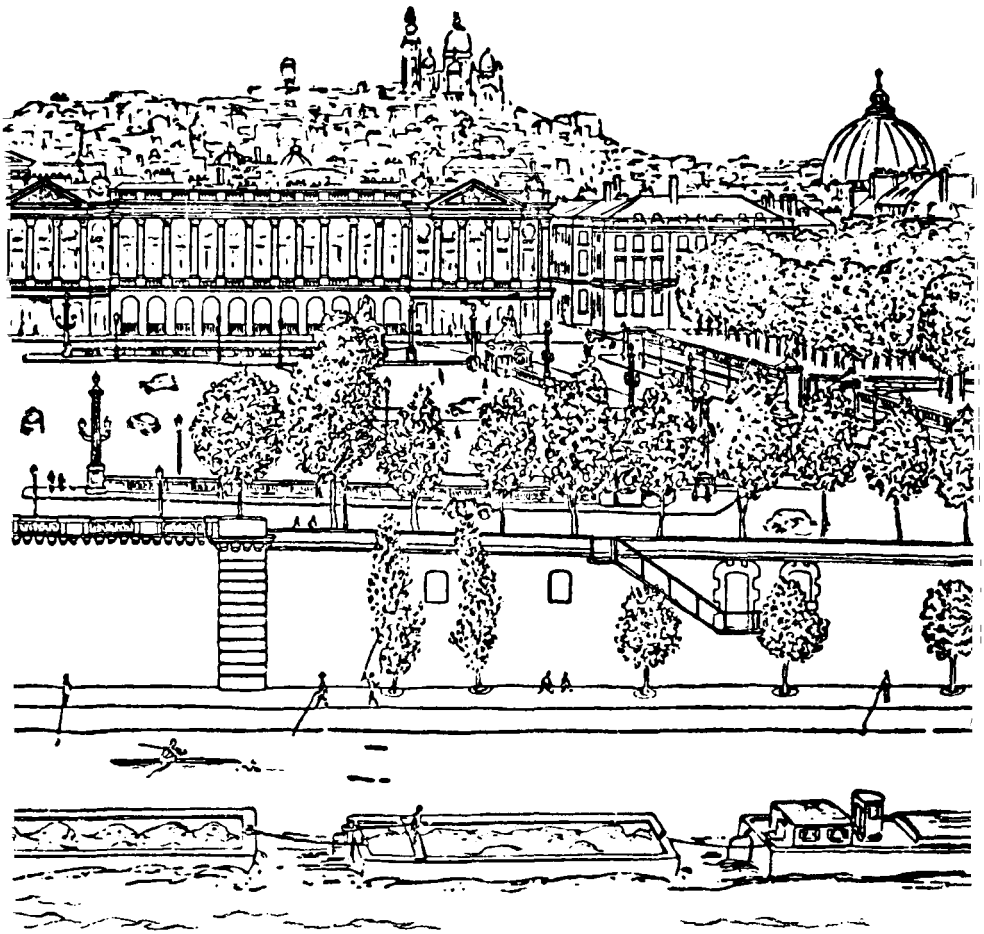

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Omega I

Dallas Wiebe

My mother died—I think of terminal sexual climax—on November 5, 1971, while watching goo-goo eyed King Kong finger Fay Wray in his king-sized palm, and I inherited $200,000. King Kong was rolling his watery eyes around, trying to focus on that little white fetus in his left hand, lowering his submarine-sized, black, greasy right index finger toward screaming Fay, Mom was squirming in her seat, the people behind me were yelling "Down in front" because I'm so tall and always had to sit down front with Mom, who was eating hot, buttered popcorn and drinking Diet Pepsi. A man behind me was tapping me on the shoulder and saying, "Hey, buddy, we'd like to see the film too so how about scooting down in your seat a little," when Mom dropped her popcorn and her Diet Pepsi, stood up, grabbed her breasts and fell, twitched, tried to crawl under the seats but couldn't because she got stuck on the wet gum stuck under the seats and because we were strapped together. She pulled me over a little when the strap pulled tight and the guy behind me said "Thanks" and I watched the show until she stopped twitching. Six months later

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I got the money and that's how I got my own movie house, the Omega I. I thought, and still do, that it was a fitting way to use those "pennies from heaven," or should I say "dollars from heaven," because she died right here, left aisle, center section, row four, seat eight. That seat she died in is now up in the projection booth—not "projection room," as some call it—and bolted to the floor, just as it was in the auditorium, so that I can sit straight up while the movie projectors are clicking gaily along through *Silent Running*, *Leo the Last*, *A Clockwork Orange* or *The Tenth Victim*. The light flickering out over the seats and through the motes of dust. The nitrogen-filled tungsten lamp glowing. The sprockets slipping those frames through, twenty-four per second, the shutters wheeling, the Maltese cross spinning left, the film flicking past the lens and through the light, sliding smoothly through the soundhead, and me sitting on Mom's death seat and watching out of one of the camera ports, looking down on my movie house, looking down at the four or five people who have paid ($1.00) their way in because there's nothing else to do in their dying neighborhood, a neighborhood, Spitzer's Corner, made up mainly of asphalt-covered parking lots, empty lots where urban renewal has knocked down the old houses and replaced them with wrecked cars on cinder blocks, and one main road, Rum Street, which suicidal drivers use to race to and from their jobs in downtown Cincinnati, cursing along in their death machines, playing "Insurance, Insurance, Who's Got the Insurance?" or "Demolition Derby" with their Pintos, Cobras, Beetles, Colts, Mustangs, Darts, Lancers, Cutlasses, Dusters and Furies.

I hear the cars go by. I hear the metal rasp and crunch. We have our invitation. I hear the shattered glass, the shouting, the honking and squealing of tires, the rifle shots off my marquee. I hear the disjointed hubcaps rolling up the spitty curbs. I hear the sirens of the ambulances, like those sirens that came for little Anne Frank. We'll be there, you can bet. But here in my movie house, it's mostly peace because I never stick my head out of the roof like little Anne Frank did and I know every little part of this building. In the five and one-half years that I've lived here I've come to know the water pipes, the gas pipes, the

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furnace and its ducts, the light bulbs, every wire that runs through the walls and to my lights. In the basement, in the walls, in the auditorium, in the lobby, in the projection booth of this old neighborhood theater where I fixed up a room right off the projection booth and where I sleep. I cleaned up the place real good and rarely ever leave except when I go out for chili at the Bluebird Restaurant or we three go out to buy groceries and light bulbs for the marquee from Oscedo's Fruit and Food one block north up Rum Street. My films are delivered and picked up by armored car. I do my business by mail, even though I have to give the mailman hazardous-duty pay. My assistants, Tracy Burdon and Ludovic Godescalc, live in the basement and help me run the place. We all work to clean the Omega I while I handle the films and show the movies. She sells tickets and he takes the tickets, tears them in two, makes and sells popcorn and sometimes some of the old, gooey Snickers still left in the candy case from the previous owners—we're worried now because we're about to run out—to the five or six people who wander in in the evenings, or during the matinees on Saturdays and Sundays, to see *Dog Day Afternoon*, *Freaks* or *The Exterminating Angel*.

But that's not what my movie house is about. First of all, when I got the place, I changed the name right off. I had the marquee repainted yellow, I put in all new light bulbs in the marquee, in the lobby and in the auditorium, I cleaned the pigeon droppings off the top of the marquee, I took down the name, "Esquire," and I put up in big black letters "Omega I" so that it would be my movie house—where I could show what I wanted to show and when I wanted to show it. There's nothing symbolic about the name I gave it. I just liked the sound of it—and still do. I knew some people would say, "Well, he named it that way because a movie house is a symbol of life." Or, "Life is a theater." That idiot response has to be tolerated, I guess, because there's no connection between my theater and what's outside its walls. In here there's peace and Sam Peckinpah, Stanley Kubrick, Roman Polanski and Milos Forman. Out there there's murder, rape, theft, politics, suicide, insanity, birth damage, learning disabilities, war,

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sexual perversion, disfigured and malformed people, automobiles with drivers, drunks with Mad Dog 20-20, baseball players with bats, a female novelist with a Winchester 30-30. The Omega I is something beyond all that. Life can't be like it. Life is not a theater and a theater is not life. My movie house takes me and Tracy and Ludovic way beyond what some half-educated pedant might gather from the name of my movie house as he or she drives past at fifty miles per hour dodging the dead bodies—dogs, cats, 'possoms, rats, boys, girls, daddies, moms—that lie around on Rum Street until the ambulances with sirens like those that came for little Anne Frank come to pick them up. They can't know what the Omega I is by going to a movie once a week at the big theaters downtown. My theater takes me away. Takes me, and my helpers, into a warp where the woof, woof, woof of car wrecks, sirens, pedants and rifle bullets is but another frame flipped past a lighted and out-of-focus lens with a shutter cutting out the light forty-eight times per second so it won't flicker in our eyes.

After changing the name of the place and after unbolting Mom's memorial chair from the floor of the auditorium and after bolting it down behind a film port in the projection booth, I got in my first film, *The Wild Bunch*, and the invitation. I took the film up from the armored car, dodged three quick slugs into the marquee, to the projection booth, threaded it into the two projectors. I turned down the house lights, called Ludovic and Tracy from the basement where they were arranging their beds and shelves behind the furnace, their new home—they had brought what they could, with smiles of thanksgiving, from their old cardboard shack behind the Water and Sand Funeral Home. I turned off the exit light down at the front of the auditorium. That light in movie houses always bothered me. I detested sitting to Mom's left, down front and strapped in, and watching *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* or *The Gunfighter* and having that red goad just inside my peripheral vision. I hated sitting out *Gun Glory* and *The Gun that Won the West* with that red distraction galling me like the leather strap that hooked my right wrist to Mom's left biceps. In my theater I turned it off, flipped on the first

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machine, focused the film. Sat down in Mother's memorial chair, squinted out the film port at my own private showing in my own movie house. Ludovic and Tracy sat down front, just their heads showing above the backs of the chairs, and ate popcorn while the ants swarmed over the scorpion. Rifle bullets thumped into the marquee. Glass splattered. Little Anne Frank opened the trap door in the roof of a Dutch spice shop and looked out at the sky. I sat straight up and thanked Mother for it all. I also thanked Fay Wray and King Kong, without whom none of it would have been possible.

That was the beginning of our life here, five and one-half years ago, in our warp. Tracy, four feet tall and three hundred pounds, Ludovic, three feet and one inch tall, bald and hunchbacked, and me. We three with our squeaky voices together. They have a comfortable home and I have my room upstairs. I use the men's latrine, down off the lobby to the left as you enter the Omega I, my movie house, to bathe and shave and wash my long, straight, black hair. There's no tub, but I wash with washrags and soap and it's not bad. We have a tub to wash our clothes in. And when we do wash them, we hang them over the empty orchestra pit in front of the stage to dry. But I enjoy my toilet, even though the crapper is in a very small booth and I can hardly get in it because I'm 6′9″ and weigh 166 pounds. I especially enjoy it because while I'm carrying on my cleaning I can read the graffiti which I encourage and which I sometimes write myself. I'm not sure which of them are mine, most of the time, and I never remove any of them. I leave a felt marking pen hanging on a string next to the wash basin so that customers can add "Laurel is Hardy," "Rin Tin Tin loves Lassie," "My Friend Flicka eats hay," "Cheetah sucks Jane." Mine include: "The Gunslinger wore tight pants," "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly are all around you," "Every day is a good day for a hanging" and "How Green Was My Valley." Once when there was no more toilet paper someone wrote on the leftover cardboard reel, "Gone with the Wind."

There's peace in the Omega I except that once a year I replace the burnt-out light bulbs in the auditorium ceiling. Tracy gets out the thirty-foot ladder and sets it up among the seats and I

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ascend, shaking and sweating, to the gray ceiling. It's hard work for Tracy, and I worry because I think she might hurt herself lifting that ladder. Her withered right leg and her shrivelled right arm don't seem to bother her too much. She says that it helps her get some of her 300 lbs. off her tiny frame. She sweats a lot getting that ladder up and then sweats some more holding it while I go up slowly, looking down into the empty space where Mom's memorial chair once was, feeling the ladder wobbling under me holding the blue-tinted light bulbs. I take two in case I drop one and when I make it to the top, I overcome my nervousness and acrophobia—I feel like fainting—by thinking of Clark Gable's moustache, a race between Trigger, Silver and Champion, Randolph Scott's smile, Hopalong Cassidy's black hat, Gabby Hayes' jokes, and I hear, way up there in the wet plaster air of the Omega I, the voice of Gary Cooper saying, "You can do it, Bruno. Yup, you can do it." I stand on top of the ladder in order to reach the ceiling while Jimmy Stewart nasals out, "That's fine, lad. Just fine." John Wayne snarls, "Unscrew the cover. Take out the burnt bulb. Screw in the new one. Don't get them confused. Put the cover back on. Put the burnt-out bulb in the box where you've taken out the good bulb. Don't open that trap door in the ceiling and stick your head out. Hold onto the ladder with your left hand and back down slowly." I don't argue with John. I do just as he tells me and when I get to the bottom of the ladder I sit down in one of the seats, usually on the aisle and in the center section, and tell Tracy, after giving her $100 as a bonus, in ones, for her bed, she can move the ladder to the next spot where, I can hardly face it, I can ascend again, quivering and sweating, into the dark air high above the seats and the silver screen.

Down in the basement, where Ludovic and Tracy live behind the furnace, it is peaceful also and warm in the winter. They have two baby beds which I bought them at the Goodwill Store—good will, my ass, there's no good will out there—and some burlap sacks to cover with. Tracy puts a brown paper bag over her head in the winter because the drafts down the cut stones in the foundation give her headaches. Ludovic, 3′1″ tall and weighing sixty-five pounds, slides feet first into a burlap

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bag, his bag, like Tracy's, filled with old one dollar bills because new ones are too sticky, and Tracy tucks his crooked frame and hunched back in by tying the bag shut around his neck with a yellow ribbon woven through the jute. The rats never bother them and they say the whistling of the gas passing through the gas meter sings them to sleep. They hang their brown coveralls on hangers which hang from the low joists and float away among the paper money into never-never land in their bare, scabby skin. The floor of the auditorium is just over their heads and when the customers come and go a fine dust sifts over them as they eat their raw cabbage and their raw turnips or as they worship at their shrine set below the window well in the front, the eastern wall, of the basement. Some light gets down through that well because the well itself is covered with a black steel grate. Passers-by drop offerings to Kimoumgawasabi through the iron slats of the grate set in the sidewalk. Gum wrappers, well-chewed gum, buttons, zippers, bottle caps, nickels, empty Mad-Dog bottles, White Castle wrappers, puke.

Twice each evening and at the beginning of each matinee performance as soon as the main feature begins, Ludovic and Tracy go down the stairs at the east end of the basement. I don't particularly like it that they leave the lobby untended for a few minutes, but I can't stop them. I even join them sometimes, when they invite me because I can't resist an invitation. We have speakers hooked into the basement and we know what's going on in *Chinatown*, *Rosemary's Baby*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* or *Soldier Blue*. In the light that sifts down from the mercury vapor lights in front of the Omega I they open the dirty window and clean the offerings out and place them in the bucket that stands before Kimoumgawasabi, who squats on a wooden barrel. They close the window and kneel, chanting "Ti-ee, Ti-ee." They light incense in the dim light that falls down over the fetish with the large bird mounted on his back, a bird, a gooney bird, whose beak points upward over a stretched-up neck and whose wooden wings spread out sideways, three feet and one inch to the left and four feet even to the right. The light descends the long, closed beak, past the

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button eyes held in by wooden screws, down the post neck to the round body. Along the leading edges of the great, open, wooden wings. Over the skullcap and over his hairless head. Down over the cracks in the wood of his beaked nose. His four arms wait in the shadows. Two arms extend from each shoulder. The two upper arms reach out with open hands, palms up, fingers spread, to the supplicants. The two lower arms hold onto his ankles as he squats. A large phallus rises from his scarred crotch and reaches almost to his lipless mouth. He looks as if he is about to kiss the head of the phallus that has whorls carved in it that protrude like large symmetrical warts. A large, gold wood screw goes through his navel to hold him together and to hold the bird on his back. The light falls over his slit mouth, his beaked and holeless nose, his mother-of-pearl eyes held in by screws. The gooney bird leans his head back and guides the light down over Kimoumgawasabi in the dim recesses of the Omega I. Upstairs the guns begin to fire in *Bonnie and Clyde* or the sauna heats up in *The Virgin Spring*. Feet scuffle on the floor. Gentle dust falls through the incense smoke. We rise and go back up. Tracy to the ticket window. Ludovic to the candy counter. I to the projection booth. The silver screen dances with the falling dead.

But now it is suppertime. I'm hungry and I must, before the first performance of this Friday evening, go out. Time for a journey to the outside. Time for trial. Time for endurance. Time to eat chili at the Bluebird Restaurant. I yell down in my squeaky voice to Ludovic and Tracy that I'm going and ask them if they want to go or if they want me to bring them something. They squeak back "no thanks." Yell back that they have radishes and Gatorade for supper. Sweat starts. Light breaks through the glass doors into the front of the lobby. I open them and step out of the Omega I, step onto the ceramic tiles behind the ticket booth. A bullet thumps into the poster advertising *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Glass shatters at my feet. I blink my eyes and run out from under the marquee, into the setting sun, into the early headlights of the suicides in their Rabbits, Falcons, Bobcats, Cougars, Jaguars, Rattlesnakes, Rhinoceroses, Elephants, Brontosauruses, Tyranno-

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sauruses, Mothras, Godzillas, King Kongs. Running north a little, I stop at the crosswalk and wait for the light to change. I look back at the great bare north side of my movie house. It's blank in the early, November evening. I cover one of my lenses with my left hand. I switch on. I focus with my right hand. I feel the sprockets catching the film and moving it frame by frame between the hot light of my head and the lens. The shutters spin. The sunlight dims to a blue glow along the horizon. On the wall of the Omega I Walter Pidgeon, the world's greatest marksman, aims a rifle at Adolf Hitler. Walter pulls the trigger. There is a click. Walter snaps the fingers of his right hand offhandedly. Behind him two members of the SS are waiting. They arrest him for trying to kill Der Führer. They take him away, but he escapes and comes back, by parachute, to finish the job.

The crosswalk light changes to "Walk." I run onto the street while the drivers snarl in their braking, slobber and gun their motors. I blink a lot and hope for the best and get it because I make it to the other side, as I've been doing for these five and one-half years, in order to sit in the same booth. I can't sit on the low stools along the counter. My knees hit my chin if I try those squat blue vinyl and chrome fingers that cut off the circulation in my rump and legs. So I sit in a booth that has blue vinyl seats, a sugar jar, salt and pepper shakers, napkins pressed into a shiny metal frame and watch the feet come across the floor. A menu and glass of water appear, most of the crushed ice melted in the glass, in front of me. She says, "Do you want to order?" I say, "Yes. I'll have a bowl of chili bean, two coneys and a large Sprite." She says, "I'm not your waitress. She'll be here soon." I wait, along the wall covered with fake wood panelling, in my blue booth. Five minutes later I watch another pair of feet come across the linoleum. She says, "Sorry to keep you waiting." She puts down a napkin, spoon, knife and fork. I say, "That's all right. I'm in no hurry." She, in dark blue pants suit and with blue-black rotted teeth, takes a little green pad out of the pocket just over the appendix. "Would you like to order?" "Yes," I say, "I'll have a bowl of chili bean, two coneys and a large Sprite." She says, "Do you want onions on

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your coneys?'' I say, ''Yes,'' and she leaves. I wait. I feel the gum stuck to the bottom of the table. My knees are in it and some of it is stuck to my brown coveralls. I watch the feet come across the linoleum, the shoes badly walked-over to the outside. ''We got no Sprite. We got Teem.'' ''I'll take Teem.'' ''Large or small?'' ''Large.'' The walked-over shoes and the rotted teeth fade out, a doorbell rings, a hand reaches down and opens. There is a shot. A lady's high heels lie across the floor. Sirens ring through the open window, like those that came for little Anne Frank. The feet of the detectives wander around. Someone dusts for fingerprints. The body is covered with a white sheet and every once in a while someone lifts up a corner of the sheet and peeps under to see if the stiff is still there. Cameras flash. The newspaper men—you can tell them by the press passes stuck in their hatbands—are saying, in a pack, ''Why don't you cops do something about these murders? How long are the citizens of Gooseville going to have to put up with this threat? The citizens can't sleep. Nobody's safe in this city.'' Jimmy Stewart picks up the phone. ''Hello, chief? We've got trouble. Hallelujah McGee was just murdered. The citizens are up in arms. No, we haven't yet, chief. We think they're vacationing in Monaco. No, I haven't said a word to the reporters. Right, chief, mum's the word. Right. I'll take care of it. No, no clues yet but we're checking. Right through the heart. Fully clothed.'' I hook my fingers in the gum stuck under the table and try to pull my pantleg loose. The feet walk up again. ''Did you say you wanted onions on your coneys?'' ''Yes, I want onions on my coneys.'' ''And will Teem be all right? We got no Sprite.'' ''I'll take Teem.'' The feet leave and there is a calendar lying open to September. It lies out in a field in front of bushes and then woods. Leaves fall and cover the calendar. Wind blows. The leaves whisk away and the pages of the calendar flip from September to October, then November and then December. Snow falls and covers everything, including the calendar. Winds blow away the snow and the calendar flips slowly through January, February and March as the snow slowly melts and flowers appear, skies clear, trees and bushes green out. The sun is shining and birds are

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singing as the calendar flips through April and May and stops at June. A bride and groom come walking down the country lane as a bowl of chili bean appears under my nose and I unhook my fingernails from the gum stuck under the table of the booth. A soup spoon lies on another paper napkin. Two coneys slide past my chin. There is a small glass of Teem by my left hand. Two little bags of oyster crackers lie in a little dish.

I take the soup spoon and wipe off the grease with a paper napkin. The napkin crumbles and paper dust sticks to the spoon. I stir the chili because the beans are all at the bottom of the dish. I break open the little bags of crackers and pour them into the chili. I stir them in and take a bite. The chili is cold. I take the fork and wipe it with a paper napkin. Leaves the fork covered with paper lint. I reach across the bowl of chili and cut off part of a coney and put it in my mouth. There are no onions on the coney. I wave my gummy fingers to the rotten teeth. The feet come across the linoleum again. I say, "Waitress, I'd like onions on my coneys." She says, "Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you never took no onions on your coneys." She picks up the two coneys and goes back behind the counter. A telephone rings. A hand reaches out to pick up the receiver. Fingers drum on the table. A lady's voice says, "Hello. Yes, it's me. I thought I told you never ever to call me again. Honey, I'm never coming home again. You've been mean to me for the last time. You can keep the children." The hand not holding the telephone reaches down and picks up a drink. The ice cubes clatter in the glass. Susan Hayward says, "No, I'm not drinking again. I don't need your help any more. I do not want to fight with you. I just called to say that we're through. In our eighteen years of marriage you've never once treated me right. Cheap furs. Cheap jewelry. Frederick, I don't want to argue again. I know I called and left a message. I'm tired of bickering. So don't call me one more time. I don't want to hear from you ever again. We're through and that's it. Give my love to the children and tuck them in for me tonight. Tell them their mother loves them. Tell them that someday they'll understand. Oh Frederick, why do we have to live this way? No, there is no other man. I've always loved only you. There can never be anyone

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else. I promise not to cry. No, I will not cry. I've already cried enough for one lifetime. No, I don't blame you. I'm the one at fault. I just couldn't live a lie any longer. It was me and my problems, not you or the mongoloid kids. You know how difficult it was for me when Helen was born with no arms and a pointed head. Of course you tried to make things better for me. But you never, never once, told me that your mother was born with her hands attached to her shoulders. Of course you talked about phocomelia. But how was I to know what that meant?'' The two coneys, one with a bite missing, appear by my right shoulder. There are some onions on the coneys. I take up the greasy fork and take a bite from the unbitten coney. It's cold. I sip the Teem. It's watery and warm.

Now your coney is, technically, a sandwich. It is a bun, a wiener bun, slit lengthwise but not completely in two. A small, finger-like wiener is laid lengthwise inside the slit in the bun. Mustard is then rubbed onto the wiener and, usually, also on the bun. Chili, without beans, is then poured over the wiener and the mustard. The bun becomes a little gravy dish that holds the chili around and on top of the mustard and the wiener. Then a spoonful of chopped onions is dumped across the top of the chili. There you have your regular coney. If you want something other than that when you order a coney, you have to say so. Things like, ''heavy mustard'' or ''no mustard,'' because lots of people don't like mustard on their coneys. I do. So I order regular coneys. And if you want some grated cheese on top of it all, you have to say, ''I'll take two cheese coneys.'' Then you get a bun—or, in this case, two buns—slit lengthwise but not in two, with a fingery wiener laid in the crevice. Mustard is spread along the wiener lengthwise, usually with a small stick that looks like it came from an all-day sucker. Chili, without beans, is then slopped over it all so that the wiener floats in the mustard and chili and the bun becomes a gravy boat but with no gravy ladle for the wiener, the mustard and the chili. Onions are slapped on and float around in the chili. Then, a little furry cover of orange, grated cheese is combed over the chili, the wiener, the mustard and the bun. There you have your cheese coney. But you don't get that unless you order

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it special. Your regular coney has no cheese on it and that's what I always order. For the last five and one-half years I've been ordering regular coneys. Once I did order "heavy onion" on my coneys. I got so many onions that I decided not to do that again. Your regular coney is my dinner.

I finish my food and wave to the rotted black teeth sticking out of the yellow gums. The feet come across the floor. She says, "Will that be all?" "Yes," I say, "and I'll have my check, please." She takes out the little green pad from her pocket just over her appendix, finds a pencil stuck to the pocket, and the feet go back to the glass counter by the cash register. She adds up the bill. She returns. She slides the green bill, face down, through the water and spilled chili on the formica top of the booth table. I pick it up, throw down a couple of dimes, unhook my brown coveralls from the gum, slide my cramped legs out of the booth, walk to the cash register and wait. It's a hot afternoon. The sun is "beating down." Dust and tumbleweeds roll along over the sand and past the cactuses. Suddenly a rider comes out of a large canyon, furiously whipping his horse that is lathered with sweat. Behind him you can see a pack of Indians howling and riding, without saddles, and whooping it up. The rider heads toward a fort that stands right out in the desert. The men on the walls see the dust in the distance. A bugle sounds. The big wooden gates in the front of the fort are flung open. The rider races in, jumps from his still running horse. The gates are flung shut and a huge plank is slid across the inside of the gate to seal out the Indians. The rider runs into the office of the commanding officer, salutes, throws some saddlebags on the desk. Beside the commanding officer is his daughter, Maureen O'Hara, in an off-the-shoulder evening gown. The commanding officer smokes his pipe. Fess Parker, in buckskin, with lots of fringes, salutes, and says, "Raining Fire and his renegade bucks have broken out of the reservation and are burning out the settlers along the Rio Bravo." Outside the gates, the Indians ride closer. A shot is fired. An Indian falls. Holding onto the reins of the spotted horse so that the horse falls on its side,too. The Indians ride out of rifle range. They regroup. Ride whooping towards the gate of the fort. More

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shots. More Indians fall sideways along with their horses. But the chief rides in close. He throws a lance that sticks, straight out, in the wooden gate. On the lance are eagle feathers and the dried scrotums of Mormons. Miss Pimples appears in the next frame. Something's burning. Maybe little Anne Frank. She says, "Sorry you had to wait. Let's see now. What did you have?" I hand her the little green bill and she says, "Was that a bowl of chili bean, two coneys and a large Sprite?" "Yes," I say. "But we don't have Sprite. We got Teem." I say, "That's right. I forgot. It was a bowl of chili bean, a small Teem and two coneys with onions." "Oh," she says, "you had two regular coneys." "Yes," I say, "two regular coneys with onions." "Well," Miss Dandruff says, "you don't have to order the onions separate when you order regular coneys. They come with the coneys. If you don't want no onions on your coneys then you have to say so. Regular coneys always have onions on them. That's what a regular coney is." Ronald Coleman says, "There's a tobacconist right around the corner." His friend says, "But I thought you said you'd never been in Liverpool before?" Ronald removes his pipe from his mouth, stares at the change in his palm. He's five cents short. He says, "You've not given me the correct change." Miss Dandruff says, "Well, let me add it all again. What did you give me?" Ronald says, "I gave you two one dollar bills." "Right," she says, and hands him three one dollar bills. He puts them in his pocket and walks out of the Bluebird Restaurant ("Home Cooking. Chili.") Greer Garson, sitting in the back booth by the juke box, ogles him as he walks out. The "love light" in her eyes turns into a single tear and Ronald notices, for the first time, that she's grinding her teeth and slobbering.

It is early evening when I leave the Bluebird. I blink into the setting November sun and get set for my dash across Rum Street. I stand by the pedestrian crossing and wait. No one stops. I wait some more. The sun sinks lower. The rays become more dangerous. When I look west across the street spots dance over the windshields, the bumpers, the pointed hoods and the pointed heads of the maniac drivers. It's almost time to begin the show. I lower one foot off the curb. Leap back. A Starfire

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tries to put me in orbit. Blink, blink. Zoom, zoom. Snarl, snarl. Honk, honk. Once again off the slick slope of the curb. A Fiat gives me an order. I retreat. Road Runners, Rabbits and Coyotes race by, go by. Go by! An opening appears. I run into the street, off the spit-slicked curb, my bowl of chili bean, two regular coneys with onions and my small Teem bubbling out of my stomach and up my throat. I rechew the wieners and swallow them with my eyes locked on the double yellow line down the middle of the street and my mind scanning the triple yellow streak down my back. A Fury tries to squash my heels. A bullet rings off his bumper. A Swinger tries to push me up into the air so high, up into the air so high, so high. A Tempest tries to blow me away. A Dasher challenges me to a footrace. A Duster tries to dust me off. Clanging bullets off hoods and fenders. Rear windows shatter. Tail lights drop out. A Lancer tries to impale me. A Hornet tries to sting me. A Bobcat and a Cougar claw at my ass. A Cutlass tries to slice me up neatly. A Pinto, a Colt and a Mustang try to corral me in the second lane. A Dart follows me up onto the curbing on my side of Rum Street. "King's X!" I scream as a Falcon flits down toward me and the marquee of my movie house, the Omega I. The doors are locked. A Gremlin sticks the lock and I panic. I get the doors open. Fall in. Locked just as a Super Beetle and a Cobra try to crawl over my threshold to chew on my size fifteen feet. Two bullets whop into the marquee. Glass floats down. Sweating and shaking, I dump my small Teem, my bowl of chili bean and my two regular coneys, with onions, on the octagonal tiles of my fainting.

I come to. But why, I wonder. I think of the invitation and my R.S.V.P. Ludovic is mopping up the puke. I smell popping popcorn. Outside, under the marquee, ten people wait in line for tickets to *Dr. Strangelove*. I try to say something to Tracy, but she waves me gently down. I want to help with the mopping but Ludovic squeezes out the last of the chili into the bucket. I hear Tracy saying, "Get up into the booth. We've got big business tonight." I look out the doors towards the ticket booth. The customers are shrugging down into their coats to dodge the flying slugs and the falling glass. I rise and Tracy

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hustles out into the ticket booth with her hands over her eyes. She has a great fear of seeing the one that will get her. Ludovic puts away the mop and the bucket. He goes behind the old glass counter and gets ready to rip the tickets in half by greasing his fists with melted butter. I rise and go up into the projection booth. I switch on the red exit light because it's the law, even though the exit door opens over a pit full of trash. I switch on the tape player and hear "The Jupiter" roll out over the auditorium and watch as the ten customers wander into the 350 seats and take ten minutes choosing where to sit. One wants to sit where Mom's memorial seat once was. I smile and hope he'll try. I open the curtains. I dim the house lights. I turn down the music. Blue glow along the bottom of the silver screen. "No smoking please." I squeeze out the blue glow. Switch on. My light points out over the raised heads of the audience. Action. And the great silver penises of the U.S. Air Force glide out over "Try a Little Tenderness." I shorten my lens to focus the film. The shadows flick out from my port. Mom's chair is grainy and hairy. My shadows play through the motes and the descending cigarette smoke.

During the first showing, fifteen more customers wander into and around the auditorium and when I close the curtains on the exploding atomic bombs, turn on "The Haffner" and turn up the lights between showings and wander down to the lobby, Ludovic is making more popcorn and opening a box of Snickers which he found under the counter among the dust and grease and putting them into the candy case. It's the first new candy I can remember, even though the wrappers are torn and the chocolate cracked. Outside, he says, are twenty-five customers waiting in the ricocheting bullets and falling glass. It's an evening of business triumph with no casualties so far. We're making money and we're happy. Busy bodies making entertainment. Busy selves making people happy. Feeding them first class popcorn. Serving them stale Snickers. Presenting to them a great film inside the Omega I, my theater, my movie house. Even the sniper doesn't worry us on this one evening when Rum Street seems quieter than usual. So far no sirens. So far no dead on the asphalt. So far no blood in the

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sewer drains. A quiet world out there. I think I hear a bird. After the end of the second showing, after the forty-two people leave—we've sold fifty-six tickets in all—I turn off the lights. Close the lids over the lenses. Close the curtain over the silver screen. Turn off all the switches, including all lights. And walk around with my flashlight. Ludovic and Tracy have gone down to their basement and I hear them squeaking their late obeisance to Kimoumgawasabi. I hear them scraping in the offerings from under the grate in the sidewalk. I hope they have enough light. I know they have candles and that's why I've cleaned the basement so carefully. I don't want any fires. Then, finally, I hear them chuckling and tickling as they crawl into their burlap sacks full of money for the night. Behind the furnace. At the other end of the cellar from their fetish. I squeak down, "Pleasant dreams." And they call back, "Good night, Bruno. We love you," in their high, squeaky voices.

Sometimes at night when *Viva Zapata* or *The Night of the Hunter* is over and I can't sleep, I go down into the auditorium and crawl around under the seats. When Mom used to take me to those Saturday matinees for *Shane*, *Stagecoach* or *Duel in the Sun*, I always wondered what was under those seats. Strapped to Mom I still wanted to look up and see what was stuck to the bottoms of the seats, what things were spilled on the floor, what leftovers followed an afternoon of *The Ox Bow Incident* or *High Noon*. Usually I go down from my bedroom just off the projection booth into the pitch black auditorium. I take off my brown coveralls and hang them over a back seat and I get down and crawl out into that maze of chair legs, which is difficult for me because of my size and my big, beaked nose. But I make it around slowly, lying on my back and pulling myself along, scooting with my feet. To find the globs of gum sticking around, some of it obviously years old. I feel along. I find popcorn and taste it. Some of it is rancid. Some of it is greasy. It's hard to taste any salt on the spilt popcorn. I slide into Coke and I lick my fingers to see if it is diet or not. I find Snickers with one bite taken out of them and that bite lying, half chewed, nearby. Sometimes I remember where certain ladies have sat. I crawl there. I smell the seats from below. I feel around the floor for lost coins, purses, glasses, pins, handker-

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chiefs, wedding rings, zippers, knives. When my long fingers find some wet, purple bubble gum still sticking and soft under a seat, I pull it loose and chew it to taste the sweet lady and remember her, memorialize her, who squirmed and cried through *Straw Dogs*, *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* or *On the Beach*. I blow light, purple bubbles up into the darkness and think that she was probably named Susan, Judy, Doris, Maureen, Greer, Shirley, Vera, Ida, Marilyn, Carole, Elizabeth, Marlene, Deanna, Katherine or Julie. When I can't taste the gum anymore, I stick it back where I found it under the seat and hope that she'll return for another chew. But tonight I eschew the trip because I'm too tired. And tomorrow we've got to go out for groceries and light bulbs.

In the darkness, I grope back to my bed, a bed made of two regular beds placed end to end. I crawl under my canvas quilt, formerly a tent. I lay my weighty head down, spreading my long black hair out, softly onto my pillow, a gunny sack stuffed with broken films. They crackle as I let the head rest. One pokes through so I roll my head left, away from the point. It is good. I feel well. It is my time to remember. I try even though I know that I will weep. I recall. The leather straps on my wrists to hold me close to the basement wall. I recall. Mom spooning oatmeal into my rotten teeth. I recall. Daddy scooping my feces off the dirt floor and griping about my manners. I know that I faced the wall and slept by the wall until I was sixteen. I recall. I weep. I pulled the rings from the wall and walked to the window with the iron bars over it. I looked out and saw things I'd never seen before. A tree. A flower. Grass. A dog. I pulled the windows open by smashing the glass with my fist and then tearing the whole thing out of the frame. I crawled out. There was an explosion and something smashed into the window over my head. Glass fell around me as I stood, the leather straps and the iron rings with their bolts hanging from my wrists. I stood in the sunlight and blinked. More shots. More glass falling and leaves rocking down. Black spots ricocheted across my eyes. I saw the mailbox with names on it, James and Lois Ruckbein, and I heard someone shout, "Look out. Bruno's loose!" Somewhere the sirens rang, like those that came to get little Anne Frank, who stuck her head through the roof of that Dutch spice

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shop. Ten cops forced me down. I must remember. I was already full grown, with black hair down to my shoulders. I fought and wounded the cops with my leather straps and the iron rings and bolts attached to them. They were too strong. I'd been too long strapped motionless. I roll over to get away from a sharp piece of film in my pillow. My canvas from the Army surplus store is rough on my skin, but I have my heady strength from the basement wall. I recall in my own strength how I was chained to a bed which was chained to a cell wall. A doctor cut off my testicles. Mom cried. I cried. I learned to read at Northview for five years while my hair fell out. At twenty-one, Mom came for me. Dad had died of suicide. I remember clearly. After that I still stayed in the basement, unstrapped, except for Saturday afternoons when Mom took me, my right hand strapped to her left arm, to the Esquire to see *The Covered Wagon*, *My Darling Clementine*, *The Desperadoes*, *Gunsight Ridge*, *Destry Rides Again*, *The Indian Fighter*, *Union Pacific*, *Geronimo*, *Pony Express*, *When the Daltons Rode*, *Welcome to Hard Times*. To see *The Virginian*, *The Westerner*, *The Kansan*, *Nevada*, *Utah Blaine*, *Wyoming*, *Wichita*, *Texas*, *The Man from Laramie*, *The Man from Colorado*, *Dodge City*, *Santa Fe Trail*, *The Outcast of Poker Flat*, and *Cheyenne Autumn*.

I counted time by Saturdays. Until I was forty-one and Mom died watching King Kong finger Fay Wray. The ambulance came with its siren like those that came for little Anne Frank. I remember. The men in the white coats pulled Mom loose from the gum under the seats. They cut the leather strap. They picked Mom up from amidst her popcorn and spilled Diet Pepsi while I sat in the chair next to her, eating my popcorn, screaming at the projector operator to get on with the film because I wanted to see the ending of *King Kong*. When Mom had been hauled off, they showed the rest of the film, showed the bullets from the airplanes punching out the great ape until he fell not knowing what was up, and I went home satisfied. I didn't ask for my money back. I went home to my basement and waited by my wall, not strapped now, until the lawyers showed up six months later with that $200,000 and tried to talk

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me into putting it into stocks and bonds. I said "No!" and opened a bank account. A bullet smashed through a street light in broad daylight, just over my head, and glass fell about me as I walked to the Esquire. I walked right in and said, "I'll give you $50,000 for the whole place and all the equipment." I wrote out the check. And as Wilmer Gunsel walked out of the front doors, a bullet got him right in the middle of the forehead. He fell among the splintered glass and his splintered skull and the ambulance came for him with its siren like those that came for little Anne Frank. I roll over further onto my right side and curl into the canvas. The right side of my face is bleeding from film punctures. I feel drowsy. I wipe away the tears. I can't remember more now. I sleep.

It's Saturday morning and we've dawdled long enough. I've promised that we'll be there. I tell Tracy and Ludovic that it was exactly six years ago today that Mom grabbed her breasts, fell and got stuck in the gum. That we need groceries, candy for the case, popcorn and light bulbs. We must leave the theater. It is 10:00 A.M. We know what will happen. I have $2000 cash in my pocket. We stand in the lobby, just back of the entry doors. We step through them and I turn to lock them. Tracy and Ludovic take hold of my hands and we walk under the marquee out onto the sidewalk. The shattered glass cuts our bare feet and we bleed. We blink in the bright light as the second floor window across the street over the Water and Sand Funeral Home shoots open. The head shoots out. Ludovic and Tracy hold on tight as we turn left towards Oscedo's Fruit and Food. We go slowly in our brown coveralls, me in the center, Ludovic on the inside by the yapping yard dogs. Tracy on the outside by the snot-slickened gutters, walking carefully on the ball of her right foot, her heel lifted, her leg unstraightened. Her right forearm stuck straight out forward from the elbow and the right hand flapping at the end. She limps along under the oppressive fat and the second story lady shouts down, "Hey, Tracy, shake a leg. Hey, Bruno, she got a leg up on you? Hey, Ludovic, you look like you need some legwork." We try to proceed with dignity under the pale, skinny, squint-eyed head of Martha Nevus. I reach down to the limper and the hunchback, keep my

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chin up, my beaked nose arched and my long black hair straight, under her rumpless and titless meanness, under her red teeth, her rusty lips, her chest green with mold, her poisonous tongue. I, we, know she never laughs except when watching pain. We know she never sleeps. She has not been invited.

We go on under "Just leg it out, folks. Hey, Tracy, you look like you're on your last leg. You going to buy some leghorn chickens or a leg of lamb?" We go on even though we can hear something about milk leg, jake leg, table leg, back leg, making a leg, leggings, front leg, first leg, pulling someone's leg, no leg to stand on, legacy, a thousand-legger, stretching one's legs. We go on. And we know that Martha Nevus knows what we are doing. We know she knows what we are watching. We hear gunshots and tinkling glass. We think it comes from our movie house. We're not sure. We hear the cars howling by. We hear the people spitting on the curbs. We don't look back. We know she gnaws on her arms. We know she eats pork. We know she shoots damned good. We know she has written a novel. Maybe about us.

We go on in our brown coveralls with Omega I stamped across the back to Oscedo's Fruit and Food where we buy, for cash, one box of fresh Snickers, fresh popcorn, fresh turnips, fresh cabbage, fresh radishes, Gatorade, Twinkies (for me), Heineken beer (for Ludovic), creamed herring (for Tracy), and four cartons (twelve each) of light bulbs (for all of us). We start back towards the Omega I, not holding hands now because I have to carry the two sacks, one of groceries and one of light bulbs, high over the heads of my two sidekicks. Tracy says, "Mr. Dillon, you reckon there'll be some gunplay?" Doc Holliday says, "Sure ought to be." I stride on, my six-guns loose in their holsters. We stride side by side up the dusty streets of Dodge. Tracy on the inside by the snapping yard dogs. Ludovic on the outside by the spit-ridden curbs. Little Anne Frank lays her head back on the antimacassar. I cock my shotgun as we approach the O.K. Corral. We get into range. The window shoots open. The frosty, squinty head shoots out. "Hey, Ludovic, where'd you play on the football team, in the

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backfield? What'd you play, fullback, halfback or quarterback? Your mother ought to get her money back. Ludovic, you get backpay when you work for Bruno? You talk back to him? Ever give a piggyback ride?'' We stumble, limp and lurk on. Somebody's hidden the corral. Ludovic stares down at the sidewalk. Tracy begins to cry. ''Hey, Ludovic, you get back pains? Do you live in the back room? Got a backboard? How about some backgammon? Ever taken aback? Ever get your back up? Ever sit on a backporch? Play in a backyard? What's your background? Ever get a cutback?'' We're in. I lock the doors. We know her hairy words. We know she shoots out the lights on the marquee. We know she put the bullet hole right in the center of the O of Omega. We hear the shots and the glass tinkling. Ludovic sweeps it up every day. I replace the bulbs. We know she stands behind her window and watches. We know she never sleeps. We suspect she never eats. We giggle when we think of her taking a shit. We make jokes about her sex life; tried it once and didn't like it in the ear, uses her rifle for other things, uses a magnet as a sanitary napkin. She stands at her window and stares into the setting sun. We love our own darkness.

I hurry up to the projection booth to put away the groceries because I know, as Ludovic and Tracy know, that it is almost time for their movie. We've dawdled too much of the morning away already and soon it will be matinee time and too late for our film. I put the groceries in the cupboard in my room, eat a Twinkie, and stumble back down to the lobby. Ludovic and Tracy have finished their turnips. He has also wiped the dust out of the candy case and arranged the new box of Snickers beautifully. It's the first fresh candy in five and one-half years and he has a little light shining on it to attract the customers. I give him $100 as a bonus—in ones for his bed. Tracy has the broom and a dustpan to get the glass. Ludovic brings the carton of bulbs, I carry the broom and the dustpan and Tracy carries the eight-foot stepladder. We go outside. Ludovic sweeps up the glass from the sidewalk and puts it in a green city trash can along the spitty curbing. Tracy opens the ladder and sets it under the marquee. I climb up two rungs and begin unscrewing the stubs of the bulbs from the underside of the

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marquee. Tracy holds a paper bag and I drop the pointed stubs from my bleeding fingers into it. She hands me the new bulbs. I screw forty-seven bulbs into their sockets quickly and expertly. There are only forty-eight in all on the marquee. I have a lot of practice at this repair work. It is quiet. Our job is done and it is our time now. Tracy carries the ladder and the remaining light bulb back into the lobby and I lock the doors as the window in the second floor of the Water and Sand Funeral Home shoots open. We watch the blue-black barrel of the Winchester emerge like a telescope. We see the frosted hair, the hairy fingers, the red eye squinting along the barrel. Unsmiling. Three quick shots take down three new bulbs. The glass clatters along the cracks in the sidewalk as we turn away. I go back up to my room and hear and smell the popcorn breaking in the lobby and I know that the reels are in the cans. I hear them opening the doors to the auditorium. I switch on the lights in the auditorium and turn on the Overture to *The Marriage of Figaro*, Bruno Walter conducting. Ludovic and Tracy take seats in the front row and I know that they're waiting to be taken away and I am ready for that. I fold down the seat of Mom's death chair, hang my wig of long, straight black hair on the light switch.

I know to open the projection ports. I stare out into the gloomy auditorium. I turn up the music and lower the lights slowly. The tape spins, reel to reel, and the Mozart washes over the erect seats, erect except for the two where Tracy and Ludovic sit down in the front row, eating popcorn, his right arm around her fat shoulders. And she reaching with her good left hand into the paper cup to pick out fistfuls of buttery, salted, fresh popcorn, yellow and crunchy from the popper. I open the curtain as the house lights fade out completely and only the blue light glows below the silver screen. I flip off the exit light. Fading blue lights with my hand on the lever. The Mozart ends in the darkness and I announce that there is to be no smoking in the auditorium. "Please, if you must smoke, do so in the lobby." I lower Mom's death seat and sit down. I strap my right wrist to the right armrest of the grainy and hairy chair. I snap the steel supply reel onto its spindle in my head, drop the

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covers from over my lenses. I thread the film from the main reel though the teeth of my sprockets behind my lenses. I draw the film down. Leave a loop below the lenses so that the soundhead can smoothly draw the film through my throat. I hook the leader of the film onto the take-up reel in my chest. When I switch on the light in my nitrogen-filled head, I feel the warm glow of my lamp as it reflects off the back of my skull. I lean close to the square hole to the theater. I open my eyes and the light jabs out the film port toward the screen. Switch on. My reels pull tight and the ratchets click the film in frantic jerks past the lenses. The Maltese cross spins. The shutters in my beaked nose whir. Black and white shadows flitter out of my eyes toward the silver screen. I focus carefully over the heads of Ludovic and Tracy. Concentrate. Sweat leaks from my leather skin. Intense heat behind the eyes. My hairless skull glows. The frames go by and on the silver screen the shadows turn into shapes. Figments into figures. Motes float across the light flicking from my eyes.

Ludovic and Tracy hoot and whistle as the title comes on: *The Filching of Eddie Punkbun*. I feel it's the wrong title. I reverse the film and start again. *Fun and Games on the Serengeti*. Hooting and whistling from the front row. Popcorn hurled at the screen. I reverse and start again. *Caterwauling on the Ohio*. Howling, screaming, popcorn all over the screen. Butter blotches on the canvas. Ludovic ripping up seats and throwing them into the orchestra pit. Reverse. Start again. *The Care and Feeding of Little Anne Frank*. Ludovic and Tracy move towards the curtain and the screen with fire. Panic in reverse. Panic starting again. Pale red screen. A huge bell, with a crack in it up the middle. A fat lady in a loincloth blams the bell, in slow motion, with a bent spoon. Fade out as Ludovic and Tracy sit down and put out their torches. On the screen: BLT Productions, Incorporated, presents *Omega Time*. Fade out. Fade in: Bruno Ruckbein as Claude Bogart. Tracy Burdon as Jennifer Monroe. Ludovic Godescalc as Clark Cooper. From the novel by Martha Nevus. Produced by David O. LeRoy. Directed by Cecil B. Eisenstein.

The credits fade out as some masked men, on horses, stop a

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train. They rob the passengers and ride off. Some more horsemen chase them. The bandits go to a saloon and flirt with the B-girls. The posse rides in and shoots the bandits. Some Teutonic knights in white tunics and with steel buckets over their heads ride by. There are slits in the buckets and on top of the buckets are steel eagles, claws or antlers. They ride out onto some ice. The ice breaks up and the men and horses thrash around for a while until they drown. A baby carriage rolls down a long flight of stone steps. A Mexican bandito says, "Bodges? We don't need no stinkin' bodges." A lousy Samurai warrior wanders along a desolate path. He scratches himself. He has a huge, curved, two-handed sword on his right side. He comes to a fork in the path, throws a stick into the air and walks in that direction pointed out by the stick. A man in short leather trunks swims along underwater with a blond lady who wears a leather swim suit. They climb up onto the bank of the river. It is a jungle. They wipe the water out of their hair and lie back on the grass. They embrace. A white feather floats slowly down. A heavy, busty blond jumps out of a flatbed truck and runs to where an exhausted mustang tugs at a lariat that ties him to a large tire. She cuts him loose. A hunchbacked man leaps from timber rafters onto a huge bell. There are handles on the bell. He hangs on, swinging the bell, pumping it until it clangs while he slobbers and howls. A man with tight, thick, blond curls plays a harp and mugs into the audience. A little man with a black mustache and bowler hat sits and eats a shoe, cutting it nearly into bite-size pieces and belching. A thin girl opens the trap door in the roof of a Dutch spice store and looks out at the sky. A buttoned-down tank rattles through a narrow street, stops in front of a house. No one gets out of the tank. It stands a while and then drives off. Search lights spin their long beams off the sky. Black limousines line up to let their passengers out for a theater premiere. A limousine pulls up to the red carpet by the door. A woman with short blond hair and a black, filmy dress steps out. Her dress is caught in the door. When she walks away her skirt tears off and she enters the theater in her girdle and black hose. A bullet slams into the marquee over her head. Glass clatters but no one ducks. Men in tuxedos and top

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hats follow her into the theater, the Omega I. In the lobby there is a candy case with a box of fresh Snickers in it. Three bullets whine off the ticket booth. The limousines continue to pull up and celebrities step out into the spotlights. Newsmen flash their cameras. Autograph seekers strain at the ropes that hold them back. Police link arms to keep back the rabid fans. An ambulance races up, howling its siren like the sirens that came for little Anne Frank. An announcer stands with a microphone and interviews the guests of the Omega I as they enter. He has glass in his hair. He says, "Ladies and gentlemen of the U.S., this is the greatest night ever in the history of the motion picture industry. Tonight all eyes in this wonderful nation of ours are on this theater, the Omega I. All over the world people are anxiously awaiting the arrival of Claude Bogart, Jennifer Monroe and Clark Cooper for the premiere of their latest and greatest film, *Epitaph for Rum Street*. We are expecting them momentarily. I think I see them approaching now. Yes, it is them in their yellow limousine. Oh, ladies and gentlemen, this place is a madhouse. These fans adore these great stars, these magnificent artists. I doubt that the police can control this crowd. Here they come now!" We step out of the yellow limousine onto the red carpet in front of the Omega I. Ludovic and I are dressed in eggshell-white tuxedos with a white silk stripe down the outside of each pantleg. We wear white top hats and white silk gloves. Tracy is dressed in a white, filmy floor-length gown with a white ribbon around her waist. The crowd goes berserk. The police protect us as we approach the lobby, holding hands. Tracy on my right, Ludovic on my left. Shattered glass falls across our shoulders. We go on. The TV cameras play over our scabby faces. We blink in the spotlights. We approach the announcer. He says, "Can you make a statement to the nation? All the world has awaited your arrival. What can you say this evening about this tremendous turnout?" Tracy and Ludovic hold onto my scarred wrists as I lean over to speak. My long black hair falls across my mother-of-pearl eyes and my beaked nose. I say, in my squeaky voice, "I promised my fans we'd come. And we are here. On with the show!"

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Nine Poems by Eugenio Montale

translated by William Arrowsmith

Rainbow

When, out of the blue, Saint Martin shakes
his embers down, stirring the fire in the bottom pit
of Ontario's black furnace—
crackle of green cones in the ashes
or the fume of steeping poppies
and the bloodied Face on the shroud
dividing me from you—

This and not much more—(if sign or nod from you

could be "not much" in this struggle
shoving me toward the charnel world, back
to the wall, where sapphires of heavenly blue,
palm branches, and storks on one leg don't quite blot out
this poor lost Nestorian's
excruciating vision)

—it's all of you that washes up from the shipwreck
of my people, of yours, now that a fire
of ice brings back to mind the land that's yours
and which you have not seen; I have no other
rosary to finger, no other blaze
but this blazing of resin and berries
has invested you.

* * *

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Another's heart is not like yours,
the lynx is nothing like the pretty tabby
stalking the hummingbird in the laurel;
but when you venture out beyond the shadow of the sycamore,

to your eyes, they are all the same;
or could it be that mask on the white cloth,
the crimson effigy that led you forth?

So that your work (which is a form
of His) might blossom under other skies,
Iris of Canaan, you dissolved
into that halo of mistletoe and dwarf holly
which leads your heart out
into the world's night, on past the mirage
of desert flowers, your blood brothers.

Appear and you bring me back, here, under the arbor
of bare vines, alongside the landing
on our river—and the ferry makes no return,
St. Martin's summer sunlight fades, goes black.
But when you return, it isn't you, your earthly
story has been transformed, you don't wait
for the prow at the pier, your eyes
see nothing, no yesterdays, no tomorrows;

because His work (which is transformed
in yours) *must go on.*

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In The Park

In the ever shrinking
shade of the magnolia,
a puff from the pea-shooter—
the dart grazes me, is gone.

It seemed a leaf fallen
from the poplar, dwindling
at one gust of wind—maybe a faraway
hand riffling through the green.

A laugh that isn't mine
strikes through the frosted leaves,
pierces me, a trilling shakes
my chest, pricks my veins,

and I laugh with you on the warped
wheel of shadow, I lie full length
dissolved of self on the bony
roots protruding, and I tickle

your face with wisps of straw . . .

The Garden

I don't know, messenger
descending, darling
of my God (or maybe yours) whether in the medlar
orchard where the fledgling warblers
cry, fading towards evening—
I don't know whether in the garden
where the acorns patter down and beyond the wall, airily
floating, the catkin tassels curl
from the hornbeams lining
the breakers' foaming edge, a sail
cutting that diadem of underwater

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reefs either black on black or shining brighter
than the first trickling star—

I don't know whether your muffled step
passing by, the blind nightmare from which I've grown
towards death since the day I first saw you;
I don't know whether your step, which makes my blood pound,

as it draws near this tangle
is the same that in some vanished summer snatched me up
before a gusting wind
grazing the Mesco's bristled peak
shattered my mirror—
I don't know whether the hand brushing my shoulder
is the same hand that once touched the celesta's
keys and answered the anguished cries
from other nests, from a thicket long since burnt.

The hour of torture and lamentation
which battered on the world,
that hour whose coming you read as clearly as in a book,
your crystal-hard gaze piercing
down to the depth of things, where draperies of bitter
soot, rising on fire flaring
from the forge, once hid from sight
the work of Vulcan—
the day of Wrath, which more than once the cock
proclaimed to men foresworn,
did not divide you, undivided soul,
from the inhuman suffering, did not fuse you
in the awful fire, heart of amethyst!

O dumb lips, parched from your long
journeying down the pathway shaped of air
sustaining you; O limbs I can hardly tell
from my own; fingers that slake
the thirst of the dying and inflame the living,
O purpose who created, beyond your measure,
the hands of the clock; who diffuse yourself

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into the time of man, into human space, in rages
of demons made flesh, in angel brows
swooping downwards . . . If the power
that moves the record *already cut* were some other
power, your destiny fused with mine would show
a single groove.

If They Likened You

If they likened you
to the vixen, it must have been for the miraculous loping
curve of your stride, your soaring step
which binds and divides, which stuns
and quickens the pavement (your terrace,
the streets by the Cottolengo, the meadow,
the tree you named for me, all moist and conquered,
shudder with joy)—or maybe it was simply
for the wavering light spilling softly
from the almonds of your eyes,
or the wiliness of your easy amazement
or the havoc
of feathers mangled by a single clutch
of your cherub hand;
if they likened you to a blonde
carnivore, to the faithless genie
of the undergrowth (and—why not?—to the loathsome
fish with his shock, the stingray)—
they did it because they were blind, they couldn't see
the wings gracing your shoulders,
they were blind, and they couldn't see
the sign on your shining brow, the bloody
furrow scratched there by me—cross, christening,
incantation, disaster, vow, farewell,
damnation and salvation; if they couldn't believe
you were more than weasel or woman,
who will share what I've found,
where will I bury the gold I carry inside me,
that ember hissing within, if leaving me,
you turn away from the stair?

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The Processions of 1949

Flashes of lightning at the starting-point,
ashen hour, muggy, misting,
then a halo still worse, a rumble
of wheels and grumbling cries from the first
sloping of the hill,
backwash swarming, a bitter stench polluting
the ground consecrated to us,

. . . were it not
for that refuse of yours *in vitro*, on the slimy
canal, among insects and a bubble of soap.

Who lies anymore, who still sobs? It was your instant
of forever, from which you appear.
Your furiously angelic virtue shook
its glove and sent them packing—all the holy-Mary
pilgrims, Cybele, her Corybants.

Anniversary

My vixen, from the day you were born,
I've been on my knees.
From that day on I've felt my war
with evil won, my sins repaid.

A flame burned and burned; on your roof,
on mine, I saw the horror spilling over.
Like a green stalk you grew; and there, in the cool
of the truces, I saw your plumage sprout.

I'm still on my knees; the gift I dreamed of,
not for myself but for every man,
belongs to me alone, God divided
from men, from the blood clotted
on the high branches, on the fruit.

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For An Album

With the very first light I started
casting my lure for you (I called it "allure").
But I could see no wriggle of fins
in the murky pools, no wind
with your spoor came gusting down to me
from the hills of Monferrato.
I spent my whole day searching, peering
for you—larva, tadpole,
tendril of creeping vine, francolin,
gazelle, zebu, okapi,
black cloud, hail
before the harvest, between the dripping vine-rows
I went gleaning, but couldn't find you.
I tracked you until dark,
not knowing that three small boxes—
SAND SODA SOAP, the dovecote
kitchen from which your flight began—
would open only for me.
And so you disappeared into the undefined horizon.
There's no idea can lock the lightning up,
but he who's seen the light, can't live without it.
I lay down at the foot of your cherry tree, I was
already too rich to contain you, alive.

From A Swiss Lake

My vixen, I too was once the "poète
assassiné." There in the hazel grove's
dark cave, in the hollow left by the blazing fire,
a sequined tondo set your face aflame
then drifted back down, slowly,
along its chosen way until it met
an aureole, dissolving there; while I prayed,
longing for the end with that downward
sign of your life, unconfined, bitter,
agonizingly frail, but strong.

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Is that you, shining in the darkness? Into that deep
pulsing furrow, on a path of blazing red,
hot on the trail of your light
predatory paw (an almost invisible print,
like a star) I, a stranger,
plummet back down; and suddenly a black duck
driving upward from the lake-bottom points the way
toward the new conflagration, where she'll burn.

The Shade of the Magnolia

The shade of the Japanese magnolia
is thinner now that its blossoms of peacock blue
have fallen. At the top, off and on,
a cicada trills. It's no longer the season
for singing together, Clizia, no longer
the time of the infinite god
who devours his own believers and revives
their blood. Exertion
was easier, to die at the wing's
first flutter, at the first encounter
with the enemy was child's play. From now on
the going's harder. But not for you,
deep-rooted, consumed by sun, yet delicate
fieldfare soaring high over your river's icy
landing—not for you, fragile creature,
fugitive to whom zenith, nadir, Cancer,
Capricorn were all one blur,
because the war was fought in you and him who worshipped
in you the stigmata of your Spouse—no shuddering cold
makes you cringe. Others fall back,
and droop. The polisher's subtly biting file
will soon be still, the former singer's hollow husk
will turn to powdered glass, grit
underfoot, the shade is ashen,
it's autumn, it's winter, it's what lies beyond the horizon
that lures you on, and there I hurl myself, a mullet
leaping up, up, out of water, in the new moon.

Addio.

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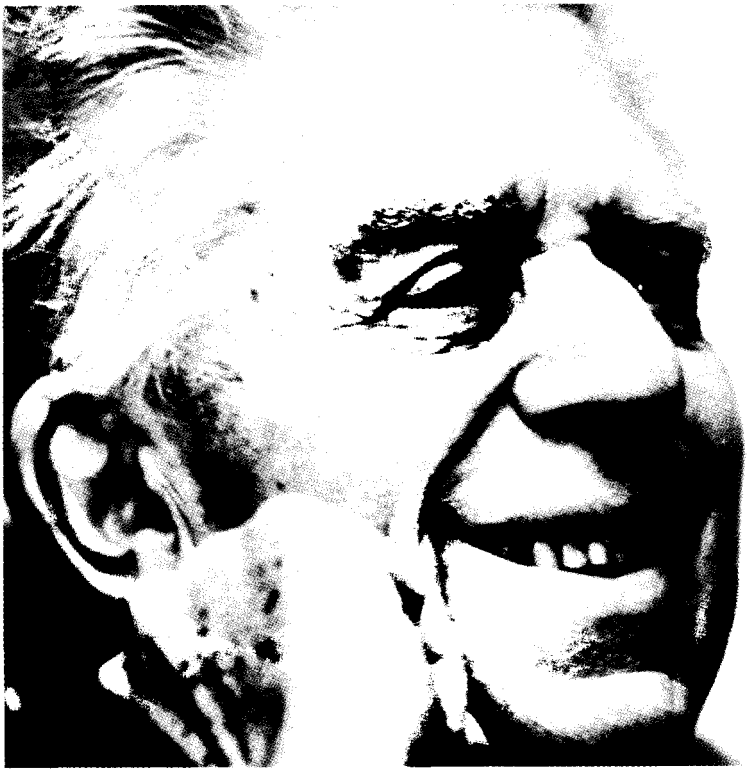

This Paris Review *feature honors the memory of Eugenio Montale, who died on September 12, 1981. Widely acknowledged as the greatest Italian poet since Leopardi, Montale was also a noted journalist, a gifted critic of music and literature, a writer of short fiction, and a talented amateur painter and etcher. The profile of Braque printed here is typical of the broad-ranging elusiveness and wit of one of the great European men of culture in our century. Montale was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1975.*

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A Visit to Braque

Eugenio Montale

translated by Jonathan Galassi

An "accelerated course" in French taste for tourists who are still in need of it ought to begin, in my opinion, with a visit to the *Marché aux Puces* and end with a visit to the studio of Georges Braque. On the one hand the odds and ends, coffee pots, cast-off rags, the second hand goods, in short, produced by several centuries of a unified and centralized culture; on the other, the same objects interpenetrated and flattened out in compositions that have little to do with the well-known genre of the *nature morte*, although they deserve the name much more legitimately than, for example, those by Chardin or Cézanne, which are so much more *vives*.

Braque's work presents itself as a conglomeration, a *torrone* of old and exquisite objects. If the term "crepuscularism" had been invented in France instead of Italy, one could say that crepuscular poetry (the world under glass) had found its classical expression in France, in the work of Georges Braque.

Among the artists over seventy who still maintain the high prestige of French painting, Braque is the one whose

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reputation is most secure, who has the least to fear from the passing of time. A poll of the man in the street throughout the world would reveal that Picasso is much better known, but if one really examined the opinions expressed one would easily see that Picasso has as many detractors as admirers, while there is almost no one who knows Braque's work and does not express admiration or deference.

And French criticism lacks the proper terms of comparison in discussing him: as in the case of Corot, the name most frequently invoked is that of Mozart. Braque, it would seem, is not only *the painter*, the true painter, of the Cubist team, but also the greatest expression of French genius in the last fifty years. It is to his cautious and prudent instinct (as well as to the much less cautious instincts of Picasso, Matisse and Rouault) that we owe—or are supposed to owe—that modern French painting, that new beauty "in the face of which even the painting of Renaissance Italy pales." (I quote verbatim from Jean Paulhan.)

These are not the views of isolated critics, but common opinions, widely held and widely accepted. Even those who continue to mistrust the spoiler Picasso and the other holy fathers of his generation bend the knee before Braque. And even those who admit that the Maestro's last works represent a standing-still or an *embourgeoisement* hasten to concede that for Braque everything is permitted, and that a Braque nodding is worth a whole generation of other painters awake.

But to see Braque, to talk with him or at least listen to him talk? In Paris, everyone was agreed that this was an impossible enterprise. Only old friends and a few important dealers, trailing several millions of dollars behind them, could cross the threshold of his studio. Everyone else was supposedly turned away by the immortal Marietta, a *femme de chambre* who will live in history like Proust's Céleste. In the last few weeks, besides, Braque had been especially busy painting certain *plafonds*, cartoons intended for the ceiling of a room in the Louvre, which because of them will become a place of pilgrimage no less visited than the one in the Orangerie which houses the *Nymphéas* of Claude Monet.

I had already given up the audacious notion of a visit to

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Braque when one day Stanislas Fumet, a Catholic critic as well as a hagiographer of the Maestro, came to my hotel and said to me in broken tones, "Good news. I have overcome Marietta's resistance. We can go." "When?" "*Dépêchez-vous.* Immediately. A taxi, let's not waste time. Later could be too late."

The rue du Douanier, which flanks the Parc Montsouris, is a modern street, one of the few in Paris where the residents can paddle around in a lovely tile bath and go up in elevators that do not present mortal dangers. The well proportioned houses by the architect Perret are of brick, and they blend well with the mother-of-pearl light of the Ile-de-France. Stanislas Fumet (round-bearded with bangs, halfway in between Giorgio Morandi and Fra Melitone) was agitated. He got out first, rang the doorbell of a small house, bowed to the sullen old woman who came to let him in, took her hands and held them a long time in his own, introduced me as a decent person who would not unduly disturb the *Patron*, and pushed me up an extraordinarily spic-and-span spiral staircase which led directly into the large many-windowed studio where the Maestro was awaiting us.

Braque! A tall, handsome, white-haired old man, wearing a jacket of blue cloth and olive-colored velvet trousers, with felt slippers on his feet. His eyes are blue and penetrating, his face massive but also chiseled. He wears a silk scarf around his neck and his glasses hang on his chest, attached to a cord.

One's first impression is that he carries his ninety years marvelously, but the facts belie this erroneous impression. Georges Braque, in fact, is barely seventy-one years old, for he was born at Argenteuil, that city of caulkers and painters, in 1882. There, as a boy, he saw Claude Monet at work and his fate was sealed: abandoning his studies at the *lycée* he dedicated himself then and there to painting. "Not so bad," his father thought. "He can paint houses, apartments."

Although Cubism was already knocking at the gates by the time Braque was twenty, his first attempts at copying Raphael (in the Louvre) or at imitating Renoir had discouraged the young painter, who soon found himself herded into the most curious team of painters our time has known.

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Misfortune never struck this sedentary man who has travelled little and whose biographers note only one important event: the serious wound he sustained in combat as a second lieutenant of artillery at Neuville-Saint-Vaast in May, 1915. He healed miraculously, then returned to civilian life and painting and had his first success. 1919 marks the triumph of Cubism, but by then the *Patron* was already bored with it, he had already, as he says, *foutu le camp*.

He presents himself (in conversation at least) as a typical non-conformist and there is nothing eccentric in his talk. *Braque* in French means madcap, harebrained, as well as French pointer, but few men are less deserving of the name than he. Prudence, economy, good management, horror of risk ooze from every pore of his squarish face; a *bourgeois* is talking, a great French *bourgeois*, not a foreigner or a *parvenu*; he talks like a man for whom the figures will always add up. The critics say that in the (ideal) Picasso-Braque couple, Braque would have been the woman, the receptive being, the shaper, the stabilizing and conservative force. But this is a metaphor for saying covertly that Braque is less daring but a better painter: an opinion faintly whispered yet never openly expressed by French critics.

Braque talked at length: of himself, of Normandy, where he lives six months of the year, of Italy, which he knows as far south as Naples. He remembers Modigliani, from the time when the young man from Livorno received five francs and a bottle of rum a day from his patron. He also recalls Soffici, who used to complain about a miserly old aunt. Marinetti always struck him as mad; among the Futurists, he was interested in Balla. Medardo Rosso? A fine talent but a *sale caractère*. No one in Paris remembers him any more.

De Chirico's first pictures were very odd, but more literary than pictorial. He knows nothing about the other Italians. (Stanislas Fumet turns out to be better informed; as a former Jew and a Catholic he reveals an intellectual curiosity lacking in other French literary men.)

Braque now shows us photographs of the frescoes he has painted for the Louvre: great black birds fluttering on a deep blue background. These are oil cartoons of colossal

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Photograph by Richard Avedon

Georges Braque and wife, Augustine
January 27, 1959
Paris, France

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proportions. "One can't be Raphael anymore," he mumbles, lighting the end of a rather evil-smelling Gauloise. "But then," he adds, "it was impossible to do Renoir over again; each era has its own recipe." Then he talks some more about his Norman *atelier* in Varengeville, about Dieppe, which he advises me to visit out of season, when fishermen from all over the world gather there, about his wife (who does not appear), about Marietta (who does, menacingly, from behind a screen).

Braque talks splendidly, like a great gentleman farmer. In Italy, only Count Sforza talked as well, though with a more aristocratic accent. He speaks and perhaps listens to himself with some self-satisfaction, and takes a look at the works that surround him: manikins with lobsters, carafes with guitars, high reliefs on medals, a vase of flowers, a small seascape that might be by an Italian *chiarista*. He is weighed down by years and glory, he knows he has become a national monument and shows he is happy but also a bit bored by it all. And I listen and look at those great painted tarts of his, that universe which to the critics is the poem of the discontinuous but which here on the contrary seems strangely caramelized, fused in one casting and then cut up into slices; a world served on a tray like a *gâteau*, an entirely mental and peaceable world unpenetrated either by faith or despair.

I look. . . but Marietta has reappeared and made a sign. Stanislas draws her aside (a *pourboire?*) takes her in his arms, then pushes me toward the door. Braque relights the Gauloise, which he does not smoke. The light of sunset sets the trees of the Parc Montsouris on fire, dissolves them into one gigantic honeycolored Braque. The same thing happened in Florence on leaving the Villa Loeser: everything around seemed strangely Cézannian. And this sensation, more than anything else, contributed to my feeling that this time I had truly encountered someone of uncommon stature; one of those of whom it will one day be a pleasure to say, "I knew him." Be he genius or talent, such is the impression left by the boy, now in his seventies, who saw the greatest masters of French Impressionism working *en plein air*.

1953

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Five Poems by John Peech

Sunday Mass

Their language, Latin or King James
said it with such force. We thought
we'd tired of its riddles,
its weight of syllables.
Better we read the mirror's face
than faced beyond the glass.

Churches, vacant as concert halls,
barely gather wind from frail voices.
Now enter a priest to pray.
Communion with the language of the dead?

Lives fulfilled for words we now discard,
who shouldered stone though never saw
the gothic arches rise: our eyes
entreat the towerless sky.

For years we'd feared the judgement of an eyelid.
Now waters we would not cross
are thoroughfares of each man's conscience.
And what should we forbid?

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The spiders we shied from as children
were only tufts of thread.
Still at night we dream of women
dressed in sheerest web.

Hardly any gathered together voices,
sliding down the other side of each week
to shuffle in place and wonder why; we pray.
The tabernacle yawns before us
like a golden calf.

The River

Today the stones lie blind
in their dried mud sockets, grey
and marked with bootsteps, no longer
the luminous brown fortresses of crayfish.

They have taken away his days.
Evenings too. Only the early morning
hours spare the moon to light
as if the water rose again.

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The Violinist

He hoists to his chin
a would-be Guarnerius;
sets sail in his own rhythm
swaying like a broken mast.
It is not his night to be Heifetz.
Three beers before six have slurred
the names of his fingers—chemist's hands,
forty years washed like sea rocks,
till the white skin flakes
in debt to the soap.

Windowed, the neighbors whisper
that his children are gone,
that he does not mow his lawn
and will not answer the bell
as he paces his house, washing
his hands, filling his glass
over and over, till the voices
are lost in the noise of his bowing.

Porch crickets below applaud
from their cracks this stubborn man
still left inside, as he plays
for the brief night's life
those favorite songs, like an attic
trunk sprung open, filling the air
with faded snapshots—faces pressed
like leaves between the album pages
now freely gliding past his eyes.

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Old Man

Old men wear gaily colored hats
to shade their spent eyes;
sit on curbstones counting
the bricks of their lives.

He looked up from his palms
to count six hours left till
the next bus left for Bridgewater.
Such hospitals should not intrude,
concealed like public schools
in distant slums, or if need be
confined to an island,
where the richer, richest men
receive the finer, finest care.
So let us not complain
about the sun or Greyhound schedules.
We seldom spoke when I was younger;
now a chance to wait together
curbside, watching the cars
file silently by, but for a
distant flurry of horns to
signal a wedding or accident.

The old man returned to his palms
and saw mango trees blowing
in Key West breeze near
the house where they once lived.

That was before you were born, he said.

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Arrival

In the fall we retreat to our bodies,
nearly cast off against the sea's hand,
diving, eyes wide to a cosmic foam,

in the flash of a wave, we saw, but no;
thrown back to nautilus corridors,
with nothing on the walls we do not know.

This night, between discs, news told us
that some great being had washed ashore.
So many came down to the beach

to see this unfamiliar beast:
only the carcass of a whale, half consumed
by sharks, dismissed to the tide.

People watched behind ropes as slickered
men hacked with axes, and pulled
their carnage toward a truck.

There are so few comings.
The sea might still
have surprised us

at this hour when every stone
has been turned and left
on its back in the sun.

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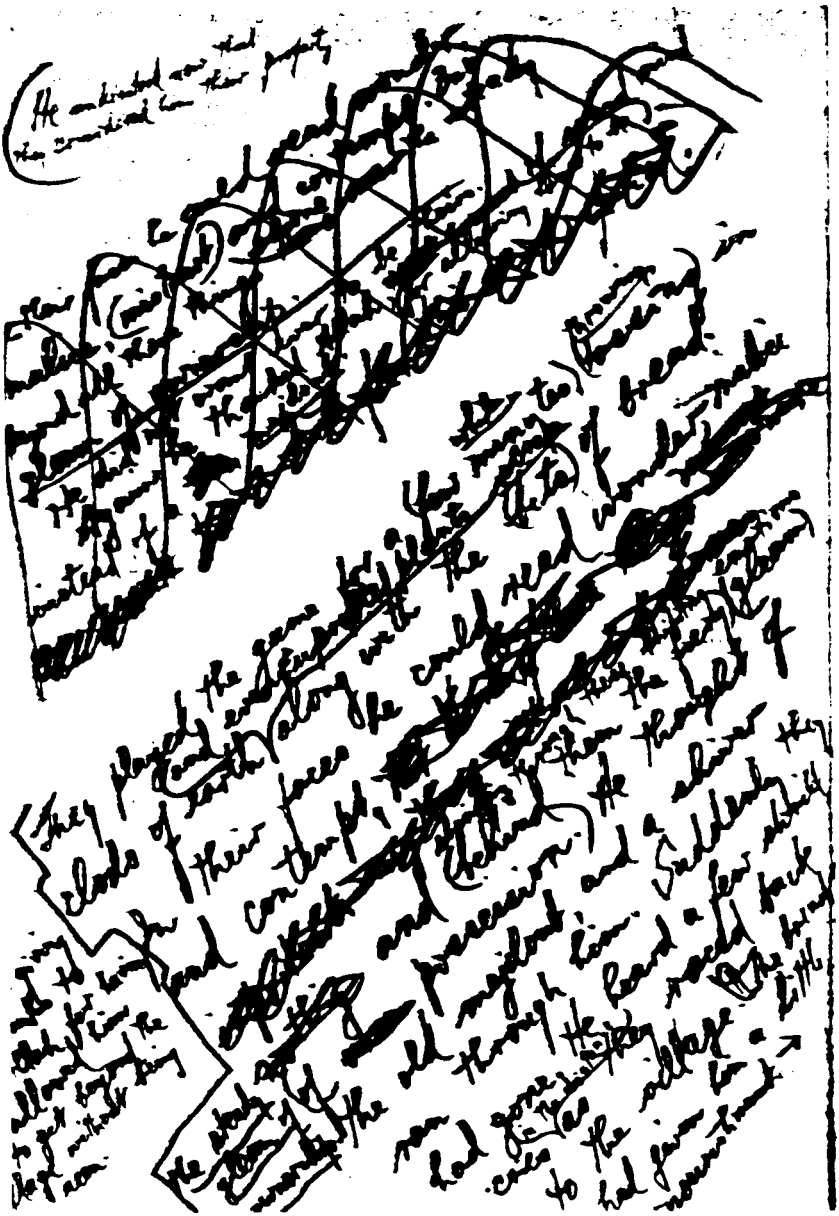

A Paul Bowles manuscript page.

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Don Bachardy

The Art of Fiction LXVII
Paul Bowles

Like any Romantic, I had always been vaguely certain that sometime during my life I should come into a magic place which, in disclosing its secrets, would give me wisdom and ecstasy—perhaps even death.

—Paul Bowles in *Without Stopping*, on his first approach to North Africa.

Tangier has been Paul Bowles' home for the past thirty years, though he first visited it fifty years ago, in 1931, on the advice of Gertrude Stein and in the company of his friend and tutor, Aaron Copland. The city which greeted him in those days with its promise of "wisdom and ecstasy" bears little resemblance to

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the Tangier of the 1980s. The frenetic medina, *with its* souks, *its endless array of tourist boutiques, its perennial hawkers and hustlers is still there, of course, though fifty years ago it had already been dwarfed by the European city and its monuments to colonialism: the imperious French Consulate, the Café de Paris, luxury hotels in the* grand style *(the Minzah, the Velasquez, the Villa de France), the now forlornly abandoned Teatro Cervantes, and the English church with its cemetery filled with the remains of knight commanders, baronets, and the prodigal sons of former empires. But the days of Tangier as the wide-open international city of intrigue are gone forever. Today it is simply one city of a third-world country in flux, slowly but steadily coming to grips with the Twentieth century.*

For those of a romantic bent, however, the power of Tangier to evoke images of the inscrutable East remains potent, despite the ravages of modernity. It still seems an appropriate place to find Paul Bowles, whose name and fiction have been associated with the remotest corners of the globe: North Africa, South America, Ceylon, the Far East. Any American who comes to Tangier bearing more than a casual curiosity about Morocco and a vague concern for music and literature considers a visit with Bowles an absolute must; for some, it even assumes the reverential character of a pilgrimage. In no way, however, does Bowles see himself as an object of special interest. Indeed, such an attitude strikes him as being amusingly naive, if not downright silly; to him it in no way relates to what he regards as the routine circumstances of his present life.

Since 1957, he has been living in a three-room apartment in a quiet residential section of Tangier. His flat, located in a Fifties-Futuristic building in sight of the American Consulate, is comfortably unimposing, though it does testify to his days as a world traveler: souvenirs from Asia, Mexico, Black Africa, as well as Morocco; a bookcase lined with personally inscribed volumes by Burroughs, Kerouac, Ginsberg, Vidal; an entryway in which vintage trunks and suitcases are stacked shoulder-high, as if a voyage of indefinite length were perpetually in the offing.

Our first meeting took place in the summer of 1976, within a

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month of my coming to live and work in Morocco. Having set a tentative date to see him, I arrived at his door in the early afternoon of an August weekend carrying my tape-recorder, a notepad filled with questions and, for autograph purposes, a copy of his first novel, The Sheltering Sky. *I found him newly-awakened, his thick white hair tousled and pale blue eyes slightly bleary; he was obviously surprised that anyone would come to call at that hour of the day. As he finished his breakfast and lighted up his first cigarette (at that time he was a chain-smoker), his thin, somewhat wiry frame relaxed noticeably and he became increasingly jovial. He asked about my impressions of Morocco and easily slipped into colorful reminiscences of his early days in Tangier and, at my prodding, of personalities who had particularly intrigued me: Gertrude Stein, Alice B. Toklas, André Gide, Djuna Barnes.*

Evidently, however, my timing hadn't been particularly good. The tape-recorder had just begun to roll when a series of visitors announced themselves with persistent rings of the doorbell: his chauffeur, his maid, a woman-friend from New York, an American boy who'd taken the apartment downstairs and, eventually, Mohamed Mrabet, the Moroccan story-teller whose works Bowles has been translating for over ten years. Each visit represented a break in the rhythm of our conversation, involving lengthy asides conducted in three languages: English, Spanish, and Arabic. Mrabet, handsome in a rugged and obscurely brooding way, was in a sardonically loquacious mood. Before leaving he asked me to bring him, on my return to Tangier, a pistol with nine chambers as there were apparently nine people upon whose elimination he was intent at that time. As it turned out, I had reason to be grateful for those interruptions. They enabled me to return and talk at length with Bowles that evening, the next day, and two more times over the following year and a half. This extra time also gave me the opportunity to reflect more intelligibly upon the details and effects of his long career as a writer, composer, and compulsive traveler.

An only child, born in New York City in 1911 and raised amid the respectable conventionalism of middle-class profes-

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sionals with a Unitarian background, Paul Bowles' youth was marked by a willful determination to realize himself as an artist. Between stints at the University of Virginia he managed, at age 18, to make his first trip to Europe where, besides writing and composing, he worked for the Herald Tribune *in Paris and met a number of established artists, including Tristan Tzara. He returned to the States within a year and went to live in Greenwich Village; while writing music and surrealist poetry he supported himself by working at Dutton's Bookshop on Fifth Avenue. One of his friends of that period, Henry Cowell, introduced him to Aaron Copland with whom Bowles began to study. Parental influence forced him to resume his coursework at the University, though he was shortly to leave it again, never to return. In 1931, at age 20, he accompanied Copland to Berlin for the purpose of studying music in earnest. This he did, both with Copland in Berlin and, in Paris, with Nadia Boulanger. His experience in Europe brought him into contact with some of the greatest literary names of the time: Gertrude Stein, André Gide, Jean Cocteau, Ezra Pound. His love of independence and his self-acknowledged lack of discipline must have been a prominent element of his personality in those days. Gertrude Stein once remarked to him: "If you were typical it would be the end of our civilization. You're a manufactured savage."*

By the mid-1930s he had returned to New York where his circle of friends and acquaintances came to include John Hammond, Joseph Losey, George Antheil, E. E. Cummings, and Georgia O'Keeffe. He focused his energies on developing a musical career, writing scores for Project 891 of the Federal Theater Project where he worked with Orson Welles. By the mid-1940s he had written scores for Saroyan's Love's Old Sweet Song, *Philip Barry's* Liberty Jones, *Lillian Hellman's* Watch on the Rhine, *Tennessee Williams'* The Glass Menagerie, *and for the Theatre Guild's production of* Twelfth Night *(starring Helen Hayes and Maurice Evans), as well as three original ballets,* Yankee Clipper *and* Pastorelas *for the American Ballet Caravan and* Colloque Sentimentale *for the Ballet International, a one-act opera entitled* The Wind Remains, *and*

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numerous sonatas and cantatas. He was also the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship. His project was a musical interpretation of Garcia Lorca's Así Que Pasen Cincos Años.

The Thirties and early Forties formed a period of leftist political involvement which Bowles now terms "a bit of softheadedness." He joined the Communist Party at the end of 1938 and left it at about the time that Germany invaded Russia. "At the time I left the Party," he explains, "I was not totally disillusioned; I was merely less passionate, and at the same time much busier in my own life."

He'd met Jane Auer in New York City in 1937 and married her a year later. For several months, while he was working on his ballets, he and Jane Bowles lived in a communal house (dubbed "February House" by Anaïs Nin) run by W. H. Auden and George Davis for the support of serious artists of every description. They took rooms which had been occupied by Gypsy Rose Lee. Their co-communalists included Benjamin Britten, Peter Pears, Oliver Smith, and Thomas Mann's younger son, Golo.

It was observing the birth of his wife's novel, Two Serious Ladies, *that reawakened Bowles' interest in fiction-writing. When Bowles went to live permanently in Tangier in 1947, to be joined by Jane Bowles the following year (the permanence of this move was determined more by chance than by actual planning), he had decided to "cut the composing cord." Although he returned to New York on several occasions to work on Broadway projects, including Tennessee Williams'* Summer and Smoke, The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, *and* Sweet Bird of Youth, *Garcia Lorca's* Yerma, *and Jane Bowles'* In the Summer House, *writing has been his primary concern for the past thirty years. During that time he has produced four novels:* The Sheltering Sky, Let It Come Down, The Spider's House, *and* Up Above the World; *four volumes of short stories:* The Delicate Prey, The Time of Friendship, Things Gone and Things Still Here, *and* Midnight Mass *(published this year); and two travel books:* Yallah! *and* Their Heads Are Green and Their Hands Are Blue. *His autobiography,* Without Stopping, *appeared in 1972. In 1976, City Lights published his trans-*

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lation of the stories of Isabelle Eberhardt under the title The Oblivion Seekers. *He has been the consulting editor of* Antaeus *magazine since he founded it in 1970. Since living in Morocco, he has done a considerable amount of translating from the Moghrebi dialect, most notably the stories of Mohamed Mrabet.*

The following conversation was tape-recorded during the course of four visits to Mr. Bowles' home in Tangier.

INTERVIEWER

For many people, the mention of your name evokes romantic images of the artist's life in exotic, far-away places. Do you see yourself as a kind of consummate expatriate?

BOWLES

I'm afraid not. I don't see myself as a consummate anything. I don't see myself, really, I have no ego. I didn't find the United States particularly interesting and once I found places that were more interesting I chose to live in them, which I think makes sense.

INTERVIEWER

Was this decision to leave the United States an early one?

BOWLES

I made it at seventeen, so I guess you'd say it was an early decision. Some people absorb things more quickly than others, and I think I had a fairly good idea of what life would be like for me in the States, and I didn't want it.

INTERVIEWER

What would it have been like?

BOWLES

Boring. There was nothing I wanted there, and once I'd moved away I saw that all I needed from the States was money. I went back there for that. I've never yet gone there without the definite guarantee of making money. Just going for the

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pleasure of it, I've never done.

INTERVIEWER

Since your contact with foreign places has so obviously nurtured your writing, perhaps you would never have been a writer if you had stayed in the States.

BOWLES

Quite possibly not. I might have gone on as a composer. I cut the composing cord in 1947, when I moved here, although, as I say, I went back several times to write scores for Broadway.

INTERVIEWER

Did you cut the composing cord because writing and music were getting in each other's way?

BOWLES

No, not at all. You do them with separate parts of the brain, I think. And you derive different kinds of pleasure from them. It's like saying, "Is it more fun to drink a glass of water when you're thirsty or eat a good meal when you're hungry?" I gave up composing professionally simply because I wanted to leave New York. I wanted to get out of the States.

INTERVIEWER

Did giving up an entire career because you disliked life in America leave you feeling hostile toward the place?

BOWLES

No, no. But when you say "America" to me, all I think of is New York City where I was born and brought up. I know that New York isn't America; still, my image of America *is* New York. But there's no hostility. I just think it's a great shame, what has happened there. I don't think it will ever be put right; but then again, I never expect anything to be put right. Nothing ever is. Things go on and become other things. The whole character of the country has changed beyond recognition since my childhood. One always thinks everything's got

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worse—and in most respects it has—but that's meaningless. What does one mean when one says that things are getting worse? It's becoming more like the future, that's all. It's just moving ahead. The future will be infinitely "worse" than the present; and in *that* future, the future will be immeasurably "worse" than the future that we can see. Naturally.

INTERVIEWER

You're a pessimist.

BOWLES

Well, look for yourself. You don't have to be a pessimist to see it. There's always the chance of a universal holocaust in which a few billion people will be burned. I don't hope for that, but it's what I see as a probability.

INTERVIEWER

Can't one also hope for things like a cure for cancer, an effective ban on nuclear arms, an upsurge of concern for the environment, and a deeper consciousness of being?

BOWLES

You can hope for anything, of course. I expect enormous things to happen in the future, but I don't think they'll be things which people born in my generation will think are great and wonderful. Perhaps people born in 1975 will think otherwise. I mean, people born in 1950 think television is great.

INTERVIEWER

Because American technology has already contributed so much to making what you regard as an inevitably undesirable future, I guess it's understandable that living outside your indigenous culture became almost a compulsion with you.

BOWLES

Not almost; it was a *real* compulsion. Even as a small child, I was always eager to get away. I remember when I was six years

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old, I was sent off to spend two weeks with someone—I don't know who it was or why I was sent—and I begged to stay longer. I didn't want to go home. Again, when I was nine and my father had pneumonia, I was sent off for a month or two and I kept writing letters asking, "Please, let me stay longer." I didn't want to see my parents again. I didn't want to go back into all that.

INTERVIEWER

In *Without Stopping*, you were quite frank about your feelings toward your parents in describing the fondness you had for your mother and your estrangement from your father.

BOWLES

I think most boys are fond of their mothers. The hostility involved with my father was very real. It started on his side and became reciprocated, naturally, at an early age. I don't know what the matter was. Maybe he didn't want any childen. I never knew the real story of why he was so angry with me, although my maternal grandmother told me it was simply because he was jealous. She said he couldn't bear to have my mother pay attention to this third person, me. It's probably true.

INTERVIEWER

Did this negative relationship with your father affect your becoming a traveler and an artist?

BOWLES

Probably, I don't know. I've never really gone over it in my mind to see what caused what. I probably couldn't. It's obvious that a shut-in childhood is likely to make an introverted child and that an introverted child is more likely to be "artistic."

INTERVIEWER

Your parents weren't enthusiastic about your going off to Europe when you were only eighteen?

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BOWLES

It wasn't a matter of their being enthusiastic or not, inasmuch as they knew nothing about my going. I had the money for my passage to France, plus about twenty-five dollars.

INTERVIEWER

Were you running away from something?

BOWLES

No, I was running toward something, although I didn't know what at the time.

INTERVIEWER

Did you ever find it?

BOWLES

Yes, I found it over the years. What I was ultimately running toward was my grave, of course: "The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

INTERVIEWER

You began studying with Aaron Copland not long after your return from that first trip abroad. How would you describe your experience with Copland?

BOWLES

It couldn't have been better. He was a wonderful teacher.

INTERVIEWER

Apparently Copland was able to compose professionally outside of New York, yet you say that you weren't.

BOWLES

No, because I had to make a living at writing music. If I'd had a private income I could have composed anywhere, as long as I'd had a keyboard. A few composers don't even need that, but I do. Aaron and I had a very hard time the first summer here in Tangier, in 1931. Gertrude Stein had told us that it would be easy to get a piano, but it wasn't. Nowadays it's

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impossible, but in those days you still could if you really looked. We finally found one. It wasn't very good, and the problem of getting it up the mountain to the house we'd rented was horrendous. The road wasn't paved so it had to come up on a donkey. Just as it was going through the gate the piano fell off with a WHAM!!! and I thought, "That's the end of our summer." It worked out all right, eventually. Aaron was writing a short symphony and although he couldn't finish it, he was able to do some work on it. Of course, he worked constantly.

INTERVIEWER

Weren't you as diligent a worker as Copland?

BOWLES

I wouldn't say so, no. When we were in Berlin, it seemed that I was always going somewhere else. Aaron was rather annoyed by that. I was supposed to be studying, but instead I would set out for Austria or Bavaria.

INTERVIEWER

What was your impression of Berlin back then?

BOWLES

Well, I wasn't there for very long, only four months; one whole spring. But it was crazy. Really crazy. It was like a film of Fritz Lang's. You had the feeling that all of life was being directed by Lang. It was sinister because of the discrepancy between those who had and those who didn't, and you felt it all very intensely. The 'haves' were going hog-wild while the 'have-nots' seethed with hatred. There was a black cloud of hatred over the whole east end of the city. It was that summer that the *Disconto-Gesellschaft* failed. You felt the catastrophe coming, which gave an uncomfortable tinge to everything that happened. Christopher Isherwood was living it rather than writing about it then.

INTERVIEWER

How did you react when Isherwood gave your name to his

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best-known character creation?

BOWLES

Sally Bowles? I thought it was quite natural, really. We'd all been there together through the whole season and we used to eat lunch together every day. He didn't want to use her real name, Jean Ross, so he used mine. Where he got "Sally," I don't know.

INTERVIEWER

From your recollection, did the real Jean Ross much resemble the character she had inspired?

BOWLES

I'd say so. Yes. She was very attractive, and also very amusing. Christopher was always with her. They lived in the same rooming house on the Nollendorfstrasse. I lived on Guntzelstrasse, in a room with a balcony, I remember. Aaron took a flat that belonged to an American poet named Alfred Kreymborg on the Steinplatz, so I would go there for my lessons every day. We'd have lunch with Stephen Spender, Christopher, and Jean. We always had that nucleus. We generally ate at the Café des Westens opposite the Kaisergedachtniskirche.

INTERVIEWER

Did you know that you were observing the genesis of *Goodbye to Berlin*?

BOWLES

How would I? I had no idea that he was going to write a book. One was just concerned with living each day as it came. I met some of the people in *The Berlin Stories*, but I never suspected they were going to be "immortalized."

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever felt any professional antagonism toward other artists?

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BOWLES

No, I've never been like that at all. I refuse to play. I told you I don't have much of an ego. I meant it. To take part in such games, you have to believe in the existence of your personality in a way that I don't. And I couldn't do it. I could pretend, but it wouldn't get me very far.

INTERVIEWER

When you were a young man making the acquaintance not only of other young writers such as Isherwood and Auden but also getting to know more established writers, like Stein and Cocteau, were you consciously attempting to become part of an artistic community? Were you looking to be nurtured by contact with other artists?

BOWLES

I was never aware of wanting to become part of a community, no. I wanted to meet them. I suppose I simply felt that I was taking pot shots at clay pipes. Pop! Down goes Gertrude, down goes Jean Cocteau, down goes André Gide. I made a point of those things—meeting Manuel de Falla, for example—for no reason at all. I went to Granada, found his door, knocked, went in, and spent the afternoon. He had no idea who I was. Why I did that, I don't know. Apparently I thought such encounters were important or I wouldn't have bothered, because it involved a lot of work and sometimes a sacrifice of something I cared about. But exactly how I felt I can't remember, because it wasn't an intellectual thing. It was "unthought," and it's hard for me to recall the reason for it. Of course, I've never been a thinking person. A lot seems to happen without my conscious knowledge.

INTERVIEWER

Has it always been that way, or has it developed over the years?

BOWLES

It was always like that. All through my late teens, from

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sixteen on, I was writing surrealist poetry. I read André (Breton) who explained how to do it, and so I learned how to write without being conscious of what I was doing. I learned how to make it grammatically correct and even to have a certain style without the slightest idea of what I was writing. One part of my mind was doing the writing, and God knows what the other part was doing. I suppose it was bulldozing the subconscious, dredging up ooze. I don't know how those things work, and I don't want to know.

INTERVIEWER

It sounds as though Breton served to inspire your early writing. Did you have many "inspiration" writers?

BOWLES

Not really. During my early years in Europe, I was very much taken with Lautréamont. I carried him with me wherever I went, but I got over that and didn't supplant him with anyone else. You may have such enthusiasms when you're very young, but you don't usually have them when you get older, even a few years older. There were many writers whom I admired, and if they were living I tended to seek them out: Stein, Gide, Cocteau, many others.

INTERVIEWER

Your autobiography, *Without Stopping*, seemed to overflow with the names of artists, writers, famous people in general, whom you'd met.

BOWLES

And yet I cut many of them out. I saw when I was finished that it was nothing but names, so I cut out fifty or sixty. The reason for all that was that Putnam wanted the book to be a roster of names; they stressed that at the beginning, before I signed the contract. If they'd just left me alone without all the stipulations, I think I could have done something more personal. Actually, I think the first half was personal enough, but the last half was hurried. Time was coming to an end and I had

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to meet the deadline. They'd already allowed an extra year in the contract, so I just rushed it off. I'd never do another book like that, under contract. A full year after I'd signed the contract I still hadn't begun to write. It took me that length of time to recall events and sequences. I had no diaries or letters to consult, so I had to go back over my entire life, month by month, charting every meaningless meander of its course. And as I say, that took more than a year.

INTERVIEWER

You've never been a diarist?

BOWLES

No. I had no letters or documents to go on at all.

INTERVIEWER

Was that intentional? Would a diary have hindered your spontaneity?

BOWLES

I don't know about that. It was just the facts of life. I never bothered. I felt that life itself was important, each day. I didn't see any reason to keep a diary. Then again, I never thought I'd be writing an autobiography.

INTERVIEWER

How do you write?

BOWLES

I don't use a typewriter. It's too heavy, too much trouble. I use a notebook, and I write in bed. Ninety-five percent of everything I've written has been done in bed.

INTERVIEWER

And the typing?

BOWLES

The typing of a manuscript to send out is another thing.

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That's just drudgery, not work. By work I mean the invention of something, the putting down, the creation of a page with words on it.

INTERVIEWER

Did you write any of your novels under a deadline?

BOWLES

No. When I finished them, I sent them in and they were published. I couldn't write fiction under pressure. The books wouldn't have been any good; they'd have been even less good than they were.

INTERVIEWER

You don't seem to have a particularly high regard for your talent as a writer.

BOWLES

No, no. I haven't.

INTERVIEWER

Why not?

BOWLES

I don't know. It doesn't seem very relevant.

INTERVIEWER

Haven't people encouraged you along the way, telling you that you were good?

BOWLES

Oh, yes. Of course.

INTERVIEWER

You just didn't believe them?

BOWLES

I believed that they believed it, and I wanted to hear them

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say they liked this or disliked that, and why. But I was never sure of their viewpoint, so it was hard to know whether they understood what they were liking or disliking.

INTERVIEWER

Would you say that it was easier for a serious young writer to get published twenty or thirty years ago?

BOWLES

I doubt that getting "serious" writing published was ever easy. But judging from the quantity of non-writing that gets into print today, I'd deduce that today there are fewer young authors writing with the intention of producing serious work. To quote Susan Sontag: "Seriousness has less prestige now."

INTERVIEWER

In reading your work, one doesn't expect to be led to some conclusion through a simple progression of events. One has the sense of participating in a spontaneous growth of events, one on top of another.

BOWLES

Yes? Well, they grow that way. That's the point, you see. I don't feel that I wrote these books. I feel as though they had been written by my arm, by my brain, my organism, but that they're not necessarily mine. The difficulty is that I've never thought anything belonged to me. At one time, I bought an island off Ceylon and I thought that when I had my two feet planted on it I'd be able to say: "This island is mine." I couldn't; it was meaningless. I felt nothing at all, so I sold it.

INTERVIEWER

How big an island was it?

BOWLES

About two acres. A beautiful tropical forest on an island. Originally it had been owned by a French landscape gardener. Sixty or seventy years ago he'd brought back trees, shrubs, vines

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and flowers from all over Southeast Asia and the East Indies. It was a wonderful botanical display. But as I say, I never felt I owned it.

INTERVIEWER

Was writing, for you, a means of alleviating a sense of aloneness by communicating intimately with other people?

BOWLES

No. I look on it simply as a natural function. As far as I'm concerned it's fun, and it just happens. If I don't feel like doing it, I don't do it.

INTERVIEWER

One is struck by the violence in your work. Almost all the characters in *The Delicate Prey*, for example, were victimized by either physical or psychological violence.

BOWLES

Yes, I suppose. The violence served a therapeutic purpose. It's unsettling to think that at any moment life can flare up into senseless violence. But it can and does, and people need to be ready for it. What you make for others is first of all what you make for yourself. If I'm persuaded that our life is predicated upon violence, that the entire structure of what we call civilization, the scaffolding that we've built up over the millenia, can collapse at any moment, then whatever I write is going to be affected by that assumption. The process of life presupposes violence, in the plant world the same as the animal world. But among the animals only man can conceptualize violence. Only man can *enjoy* the *idea* of destruction.

INTERVIEWER

In many of your characterizations, there's a strange combination of fatalism and naiveté. I'm thinking in particular of Kit and Port Moresby in *The Sheltering Sky*. It seemed to me that their frenetic movement was prompted by an obsessive fear of self-confrontation.

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BOWLES

Moving around a lot is a good way of postponing the day of reckoning. I'm happiest when I'm moving. When you've cut yourself off from the life you've been living and you haven't yet established another life, you're free. That's a very pleasant sensation, I've always thought. If you don't know where you're going, you're even freer.

INTERVIEWER

Your characters seem to be psychologically alienated from each other and from themselves, and though their isolation may be accentuated by the fact that you've set them as foreigners in exotic places, one feels that they'd be no different at home; that their problems are deeper than the matter of locale.

BOWLES

Of course. Everyone is isolated from everyone else. The concept of society is like a cushion to protect us from the knowledge of that isolation. A fiction that serves as an anaesthetic.

INTERVIEWER

And the exotic settings are secondary?

BOWLES

The transportation of characters to such settings often acts as a catalyst or a detonator, without which there'd be no action, so I shouldn't call the settings secondary. Probably if I hadn't had some contact with what you call "exotic" places, it wouldn't have occurred to me to write at all.

INTERVIEWER

To what degree did the character of Kit resemble your wife, Jane Bowles?

BOWLES

The book was conceived in New York in 1947, and eighty

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percent of it was written before Jane ever set foot in North Africa in 1948, so there's no question of its being related to experience. The tale is entirely imaginary. Kit is not Jane, although I used some of Jane's characteristics in determining Kit's reactions to such a voyage. Obviously I thought of Port as a fictional extension of myself. But Port is certainly not Paul Bowles, any more than Kit is Jane.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever written a character who was supposed to be Jane Bowles, or a character who was *directly* modeled after her?

BOWLES

No, never.

INTERVIEWER

Yet couldn't one say that you both exerted a definite influence on each other's work?

BOWLES

Of course! We showed each other every page we wrote. I never thought of sending a story off without discussing it with her first. Neither of us had ever had a literary confidant before. I went over *Two Serious Ladies* with her again and again, until each detail was as we both thought it should be. Not that I put anything into it that she hadn't written. We simply analyzed sentences and rhetoric. It was this being present at the making of a novel that excited me and made me want to write my own fiction. Remember, this was in 1942.

INTERVIEWER

You hadn't had that strong an interest before?

BOWLES

Oh, I'd written before, of course, although of the fiction I saved only one short story. All during my childhood I was writing, and that means from the age of four on. Even at four it gave me a very special kind of pleasure to make up my own

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stories and print them on paper. They were always about animals and barnyard fowl. My memory doesn't go back to a time when I couldn't read. I remember being ridiculed by my grandfather because I couldn't pronounce the word "clock." I said, "Tlot," but I indignantly spelled it out for him to prove that I knew the word. I must have spelled it "c–l–o–c–tay."

INTERVIEWER

You learned to read at an unusually early age?

BOWLES

Three, I guess. I learned from wooden blocks that had letters of the alphabet carved on them. Toys weren't encouraged. They gave me "constructive things," drawing paper, pencils, notebooks, maps and books. Besides, I was always alone then, never with other children.

INTERVIEWER

Tell me, would you please, about Jane Bowles.

BOWLES

That's an all-inclusive command! What can I possibly tell you about her that isn't implicit in her writing?

INTERVIEWER

She obviously had an extraordinary imagination. She was always coherent, but one had the feeling that she could go off the edge at any time. Almost every page of *Two Serious Ladies*, for example, evoked a sense of madness although it all flowed together very naturally.

BOWLES

I feel that it flows naturally, yes. But I don't find any sense of madness. Unlikely turns of thought, lack of predictability in the characters' behavior, but no suggestion of "madness." I love *Two Serious Ladies*. The action is often like the unfolding of a dream, and the background, with its realistic details, somehow emphasizes the sensation of dreaming.

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INTERVIEWER

Does this dreamlike quality reflect her personality?

BOWLES

I don't think anyone ever thought of Jane as a "dreamy" person; she was far too lively and articulate for that. She did have a way of making herself absent suddenly, when one could see that she was a thousand miles away. If you addressed her sharply, she returned with a start. And if you asked her about it, she would simply say: "I don't know. I was somewhere else."

INTERVIEWER

Can you read her books and see Jane Bowles in them?

BOWLES

Not at all; not the Jane Bowles that I knew. Her work contained no reports on her outside life. *Two Serious Ladies* was wholly non-autobiographical. The same goes for her stories.

INTERVIEWER

She wasn't by any means a prolific writer, was she?

BOWLES

No, very unprolific. She wrote very slowly. It cost her blood to write. Everything had to be transmuted into fiction before she could accept it. Sometimes it took her a week to write a page. This exaggerated slowness seemed to me a terrible waste of time, but any mention of it to her was likely to make her stop writing entirely for several days or even weeks. She would say: "All right. It's easy for you, but it's hell for me, and you know it. I'm not you. I know you wish I were, but I'm not. So stop it."

INTERVIEWER

The relationships between her women characters are fascinating. They read like psychological portraits, reminiscent of Djuna Barnes.

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BOWLES

In fact, though, she refused to read Djuna Barnes. She never read *Nightwood*. She felt great hostility toward American women writers. Usually she refused even to look at their books.

INTERVIEWER

Why was that?

BOWLES

When *Two Serious Ladies* was first reviewed in 1943, Jane was depressed by the lack of understanding shown in the unfavorable reviews. She paid no attention to the enthusiastic notices. But from then on, she became very much aware of the existence of other women writers whom she'd met and who were receiving laudatory reviews for works which she thought didn't deserve such high praise: Jean Stafford, Mary McCarthy, Carson McCullers, Anaïs Nin. There were others I can't remember now. She didn't want to see them personally, or see their books.

INTERVIEWER

In the introduction that Truman Capote wrote for the collected works, he emphasized how young she'd been when she wrote *Two Serious Ladies*.

BOWLES

That's true. She began it when she was twenty-one. We were married the day before her twenty-first birthday.

INTERVIEWER

Was there something symbolic about the date?

BOWLES

No, nothing "symbolic." Her mother wanted to remarry and she had got it into her head that Jane should marry first, so we chose the day before Jane's birthday.

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INTERVIEWER

Did your careers ever conflict, yours and your wife's?

BOWLES

No, there was no conflict of any kind. We never thought of ourselves as having careers. The only career I ever had was as a composer, and I destroyed that when I left the States. It's hard to build up a career again. Work is something else, but a career is a living thing and when you break it, that's it.

INTERVIEWER

Did you and Jane Bowles ever collaborate?

BOWLES

On a few songs. Words and music. Any other sort of collaboration would have been unthinkable. Collaborative works of fiction are rare, and they're generally parlor tricks, like *Karezza* of George Sand and who was it: Alfred de Musset?

INTERVIEWER

How did she feel about herself as an artist—about her work?

BOWLES

She liked it. She enjoyed it. She used to read it and laugh shamefacedly. But she'd never change a word in order to make it more easily understood. She was very, very stubborn about phrasing things the way she wanted them phrased. Sometimes understanding would really be difficult and I'd suggest a change to make it simpler. She'd say, "No. It can't be done that way." She wouldn't budge an inch from saying something the way she felt the character would say it.

INTERVIEWER

What was her objective in writing?

BOWLES

Well, she was always trying to get at people's hidden motivations. She was interested in people, not in the writing. I

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don't think she was at all conscious of trying to create any particular style. She was only interested in the things she was writing about: the complicated juxtapositions of motivations in neurotic people's heads. That was what fascinated her.

INTERVIEWER

Was she "neurotic"?

BOWLES

Oh, probably. If one's interested in neuroses, generally one has some sympathetic vibration.

INTERVIEWER

Was she self-destructive?

BOWLES

I don't think she meant to be, no. I think she overestimated her physical strength. She was always saying, "I'm as strong as an ox," or "I'm made of iron." That sort of thing.

INTERVIEWER

Considering how independently the two of you lived your lives, your marriage couldn't really be described as being "conventional." Was this lack of "conventionalism" the result of planning, or did it just work out that way?

BOWLES

We never thought in those terms. We played everything by ear. Each one did what he pleased—went out, came back —although I must say that I tried to get her in early. She liked going out much more than I did, and I never stopped her. She had a perfect right to go to any party she wanted. Sometimes we had recriminations when she drank too much, but the idea of sitting down and discussing what constitutes a conventional or an unconventional marriage would have been unthinkable.

INTERVIEWER

She has been quoted as saying, "From the first day, Morocco

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seemed more dreamlike than real. I felt cut off from what I knew. In the twenty years I've lived here, I've written two short stories and nothing else. It's good for Paul, but not for me." All things considered, do you think that's an accurate representation of her feelings?

BOWLES

But you speak of feelings as though they were monolithic, as though they never shifted and altered through the years. I know Jane expressed the idea frequently toward the end of her life, when she was bedridden and regretted not being within reach of her friends. Most of them lived in New York, of course. But for the first decade she loved Morocco as much as I did.

INTERVIEWER

Did you live with her here in this apartment?

BOWLES

No. Her initial stroke was in 1957, while I was in Kenya. When I got back to Morocco about two months later, I heard about it in Casablanca. I came here and found her quite well. We took two apartments in this building. From then on, she was very ill, and we spent our time rushing from one hospital to another, in London and New York. During the early Sixties she was somewhat better, but then she began to suffer from nervous depression. She spent most of the last seven years of her life in hospitals. But she was an invalid for sixteen years.

INTERVIEWER

That's a long time to be an invalid.

BOWLES

Yes. It was terrible.

INTERVIEWER

Before that, though, your life together had been as you wanted it?

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BOWLES

Oh, yes. We enjoyed it. We were always busy helping each other. And we had lots of friends. Many, many friends.

INTERVIEWER

What is life like for you in Tangier these days?

BOWLES

Well, it's my home. I'm settled here and I'm reasonably content with things as they are. I see enough people. I suppose if I had been living in the States all this time I'd probably have many more intimate friends whom I'd see regularly. But I haven't lived there in many years, and most of the people I knew are no longer there. I can't go back and make new acquaintances at this late date.

INTERVIEWER

All those trunks you've got stacked in your entryway bear testament to your globe-trotting days. Don't you miss traveling?

BOWLES

Not really, surprisingly enough. And Tangier is as good a place for me to be as any other, I think. If travel still consisted of taking ships, I'd continue moving around. Flying to me isn't travel. It's just getting from one place to another as fast as possible. I like to have plenty of luggage with me when I start out on a voyage. You never know how many months or years you'll be gone or where you'll go eventually. But flying is like television: you have to take what they give you because there's nothing else. It's impossible.

INTERVIEWER

Tangier is nothing like the booming international city it once was, is it?

BOWLES

No, of course not. It's a very dull city now.

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INTERVIEWER

Things were still happening here in the Sixties when Ginsberg, Burroughs, and that group were here. To what degree were you involved with them?

BOWLES

I knew them well, but I wasn't involved with their work. I think Bill Burroughs came to live in the *medina* in 1952. I didn't meet him until 1954. Allen Ginsberg came in '57 and began to supervise the retrieving of the endangered manuscript of *Naked Lunch*, which was scattered all over the floor of Bill's room at the Muniriya. The pages had been lying there for many months, covered with grime, heelmarks, mouse-droppings. It was Alan Ansen who financed the expedition, and between them they salvaged the book.

INTERVIEWER

Was Gregory Corso here then?

BOWLES

No. He came when Ginsberg returned in 1961.

INTERVIEWER

What was Tangier like back then?

BOWLES

By the Sixties, it had calmed down considerably, although it was still a good deal livelier than it is these days. Everyone had much more money, for one thing. Now only members of the European jet-set have enough to lead amusing lives, and everyone else is poor. In general, Moroccans have a slightly higher standard of living than they did, by European criteria. That is, they have television, cars and a certain amount of plumbing in their houses, although they all claim they don't eat as well as they did thirty years ago. But nobody does, anywhere.

INTERVIEWER

Moroccan life seems to be so incongruously divided between

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Eastern and Western influences—the *medinas* and *nouvelles villes*, *djellabas* and blue jeans, donkey-carts and Mercedes —that it sometimes seems downright schizophrenic. I wonder where the Moroccan psyche really is.

BOWLES

For there to be a Moroccan psyche there'd have to be a national consciousness, which I don't think has yet come into being. The people are much more likely to think of themselves as members of a subdivision: I'm a Soussi, I'm a Riffi, I'm a Filali. Then there are those lost souls who privately think of themselves as Europeans because they've studied in Europe. But the vast majority of Moroccans have their minds on getting together enough money for tomorrow's meal.

INTERVIEWER

Through the years that you've been here, have you ever had feelings of cultural estrangement, or even superiority?

BOWLES

That wouldn't be very productive, would it? Of course I feel apart, at one remove from the people here. But since they expect that in any case, there's no difficulty. The difficulties are in the United States, where there's no convention for maintaining apartness. The foreigners who try to "be Moroccan" never succeed, and manage to look ridiculous while they're trying. It seems likely that it's this very quality of impenetrability in the Moroccans that makes the country fascinating to outsiders.

INTERVIEWER

But isn't there a special psychological dimension to the situation of a foreigner living in Morocco? It seems to me that a foreigner here is often looked upon automatically as a kind of victim.

BOWLES

Well, he *is* a victim. The Moroccans wouldn't use the word.

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They'd say "a useful object." They believe that they, as Moslems, are the master group in the world, and that God allows other religious groups to exist principally for them to manipulate. That seems to be the average man's attitude. Since it's not expressed as a personal opinion but is tacitly accepted by all, I don't find it objectionable. Once a thing like that is formulated you don't have to worry about the character of the person who professes it. It's no longer a question of whether or not he agrees with it as part of his personal credo.

INTERVIEWER

Doesn't this rather limit the nature of a relationship between a Moroccan and a non-Moslem?

BOWLES

It completely determines the nature of a relationship, of course, but I wouldn't say that it limits it, necessarily.

INTERVIEWER

You've never met a Moroccan with whom you felt you could have a Western-style relationship in terms of depth and reciprocity?

BOWLES

No, no. That's an absurd concept. Like expecting a boulder to spread its wings and fly away.

INTERVIEWER

Coming to this realization must have been a frustrating experience.

BOWLES

No, because right away when I got here I said to myself, "Ah, this is the way people used to be, the way my own ancestors were thousands of years ago. The Natural Man. Basic Humanity. Let's see how they are." It all seemed quite natural to me. They haven't evolved the same way, so far, as we have and I wasn't surprised to find that there were whole sections

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missing in their "psyche," if you like.

INTERVIEWER

Can Morocco be described as a homosexual culture?

BOWLES

Certainly not. I think that's one thing that doesn't exist here. It may be putting in an appearance now in the larger cities, what with the frustrations of today's urban life. I would expect it to, since that's the world pattern. They're undifferentiated, if you like, but they don't have a preference for the same sex. On the contrary.

INTERVIEWER

I suppose there are advantages to living in a sexually "undifferentiated" society.

BOWLES

There must be, or they wouldn't have made it that way. The French *colons* found it an unfailing source of amusement, of course.

INTERVIEWER

Isn't it paradoxical, though, because of the restrictions of Islam?

BOWLES

But religion always does its utmost to restrain human behavior. The discrepancy between religious dogma and individual behavior is no greater here than anywhere else.

INTERVIEWER

What do you know about Moroccan witchcraft?

BOWLES

Witchcraft is a loaded word. To use it evokes something sinister, a regression to archaic behavior. Here it's an accepted facet of daily life, as much as the existence of bacteria is in ours.

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And their attitude toward it is very much the same as ours is toward infection. The possibility is always there, and one must take precautions. But in Morocco only what you'd call offensive magic is considered "witchcraft." Defensive magic, which plays the same game from the other side of the net, is holy, and can only be efficacious if it's practiced under the aegis of the Koran. If the *fqih* uses the magician's tricks to annul the spell cast by the magician, it doesn't necessarily follow that the *fqih* believes implicitly in the existence of the spell. He's there to cure the people who visit him. He acts as confessor, psychiatrist, and father image. Obviously some of the *fouqqiyane* must be charlatans, out to get hold of all the money they can. But the people get on to the quacks fairly fast.

INTERVIEWER

One hears a lot about the legend of Aicha Qandicha. Who is she?

BOWLES

You mean who do I think she really is? I'd say she's a vestigial Tanit. You know when a new faith takes over, the gods of the previous faith are made the personification of evil. Since she was still here in some force when Islam arrived, she had to be reckoned with. So she became this beautiful but dreaded spirit who still frequented running water and hunted men in order to ruin them. It's strange; she has a Mexican counterpart, La Llorona, who also lives along the banks of streams where there's vegetation, and who wanders at night calling to men. She's also of great beauty, and also has long tresses. The difference is that in Mexico she weeps. That's an Indian addition. In Morocco she calls out your name, often in your mother's voice, and the danger is that you'll turn and see her face, in which case you're lost. Unless, unless. There are lots of unlesses. A series of formulas from the Koran, a knife with a steel blade, or even a magnet can save you if you're quick. Not all Moroccans consider Aicha Qandicha a purely destructive spirit. Sacrifices are still made to her, just as they are to the saints. The Hamadcha leave chickens at her sacred grotto. But in general she inspires terror.

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INTERVIEWER

The Moroccans have had an extremely violent history, and even now it seems that there's an innate belligerence in their character; a constant undercurrent of violence. Do you think that's true?

BOWLES

As far as I can see, people from all corners of the earth have an unlimited potential for violence. The Moroccans are highly emotional individuals. So naturally in concerted action they're formidable. There's always been inter-tribal violence here, as well as the age-old rustic resentment of the city-dwellers. Until 1956 the country was divided officially into two sectors: *bled el maghzen* and *bled es siba*, or, in other words, territory under governmental control and territories where such control couldn't be implanted. That is, where anarchy reigned. Obviously violence is the daily bread of people living under such conditions. The French called *bled es siba "La Zone d'Insécurité."* As an American you were just as safe there as anywhere else in Morocco, but it wasn't the security of Americans that the French were thinking of.

INTERVIEWER

One also feels, don't you think, that the concept of time is completely different here?

BOWLES

Well, yes, but it's partially because one lives a very different life. In America or Europe the day is divided into hours and one has appointments. Here the day isn't measured; it simply goes by. If you see people, it's generally by accident. Time is merely more or less, and everything is perhaps. It's upsetting if you take it seriously. Otherwise it's relaxing, because there's no need to hurry. Plenty of time for everything.

INTERVIEWER

How did your association with Mohamed Mrabet come about?

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BOWLES

I began to translate from Moghrebi Arabic twenty-five years ago, when I'd notate stories Ahmed Yacoubi told me. Shortly afterward, tape recorders arrived in Morocco and I went on translating, but from tapes. I did the novel *A Life Full of Holes*, by Charhadi, and some things by Boulaich. When I met Mrabet I knew that there was an enormous amount of material there, and fortunately he wasn't averse to exploiting it. On the contrary, he's been telling tales into a microphone now for thirteen years, all from Arabic. The only difficulty with Mrabet is getting everything onto tape. I've lost some wonderful tales merely because at the moment he told them there was no way of recording them.

INTERVIEWER

Isn't Mrabet continuing an oral tradition which is well-established here?

BOWLES

He's very much aware of it. From his early childhood he preferred to sit with elderly men, because of the stories they told. He's impregnated with the oral tradition of his region. In a story of his it's hard to find the borderline between unconscious memory and sheer invention.

INTERVIEWER

Why isn't he more popular within Morocco?

BOWLES

It's not a question of being popular or not being popular. He's practically unknown in Morocco. His books are all in English, though there are a few things in French, Italian and Portuguese. What little notice he's received here has been adverse. There have been a few unpleasant articles about him in the newspapers, but probably only because it was I who translated him. But since, at the moment, I'm the sole possible bridge between him and the publishers, I go on doing these books, even though the local critics may take a dim view of them. They feel that a foreigner can present a Moroccan only as

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a performing seal. They scent neocolonialism in a book translated directly from *darija*. At first they wrote that he didn't exist, that I'd invented him. Then they accused me of literary ventriloquy. I'd found some fisherman and photographed him so I could present my own ideas under the cover of his name, thinking that would give them authenticity. What they seem to resent most of all is not that the texts were taped, but that they were taped in the language of the country which, by common consent, no one ever uses for literary purposes. One must use either Classical Arabic or French. Moghrebi is only for conversational purposes. Then they object to the subject matter. For them contemporary prose must be political in one way or another. They don't conceive of literature as such, only as ammunition to implement their theories about economics and government. Most Moroccan intellectuals are confirmed Marxists, naturally. The same pattern as in other third world countries. I can see clearly why they'd execrate the very concept of such a phenomenon as Mrabet. His books could as easily have been written under the colonial regime as during independence, and this strikes the local critics as tantamount to intellectual treason.

INTERVIEWER

Are you still taping storytellers whom you meet in cafés?

BOWLES

There aren't any more. All that's completely changed. There's a big difference just between the Sixties and Seventies. For instance, in the Sixties people still sat in cafés with a *sebsi* (pipe) and told stories and occasionally plucked an *oud* or a *guinbri*. Now practically every café has television. The seats are arranged differently and no one tells any stories. They can't because the television is going. No one thinks of stories. If the eye is going to be occupied by a flickering image, the brain doesn't feel a lack. It's a great cultural loss. It's done away with both the oral tradition of storytelling and whatever café music there was.

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INTERVIEWER

The music here is supposed to have a mesmerizing effect on its listeners. Is this true?

BOWLES

That's one of its functions, but not the only one. If you're an initiate of certain religious groups, it can induce trance-like conditions. In less evolved cultures music is always used for that. But something similar exists in many parts of the world, perhaps even in our own. Strobe lights, acid rock and so on, I think all that's meant to alter consciousness.

INTERVIEWER

Has your involvement with Moroccan music been a means of maintaining your contact with the music world at large?

BOWLES

How could it be? It's just a natural interest which I've had since I first came.

INTERVIEWER

What are your future plans, as regards writing?

BOWLES

I don't think much about the future. I've got no plans for future books. The book of stories I'm writing at present takes up all my attention. More tales about Morocco. If an idea were to come to me which required the novel form, I'd write a novel. If it happens it happens. I'm not ambitious, as you know. If I had been, I'd have stayed in New York.

—Jeffrey Bailey

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Four Poems by James Wright

Entering The Kingdom Of The Moray Eel

There is no mystery in it so far
As I can see here.
Now the sun has gone down
Some little globules of mauve and beige still cling
Among coconuts and mangoes along the shore.
Over my right shoulder I glimpse a quick light.

I can believe in the moon stirring
Behind the hill at my back.
Before me, this small bay,
A beginning of the kingdom,
Opens its own half-moon.

Solitary,
Nearly naked, now,
I move in up to my knees.
Beneath the surface two shadows
Seem to move. But I know
They do not move.
They are only two small reefs of coral.

Some time this evening the moray eel will wake up
And swim from one reef to the other.
For now, this pathway of sand under water

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Shines clear to me. I lift up my feet
And let the earth shift for itself.
Vicious, cold-blooded among his night branches,
The moray eel lets me
Shift for myself.
He is not going to visit his palaces
In my sight, he is not going to dance
Attention on the brief amazement of my life.
He is not going to surrender the splendid shadow
Of his throne. Not for my sake. Not even
To kill me.

At Peace With The Ocean Off Misquamicut

A million rootlets
Shifting their dunes
Quiver a little on the deep
Clavicles of some body,
Down there, awhile.
It is still asleep, it is the Atlantic,
A stingray drowsing his fill of sunlight, a moulting angel
Breathing the grateful water,
Praying face downward to a god I am afraid
To imagine.
What will I do when the stingray
And the angel
Wake?
Whose mercy am I going to throw
Myself upon?
When even the Atlantic Ocean
Is nothing more than
My brother the stingray.

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A Fishing Song

I have never killed anybody
Except a gopher, and some fish.
I blasted fine gold hair all over hell's half acre
With a shotgun beside a road.
And one fish among many, a sunfish, I liked.
I cut his throat, and I ate him.
Whatever is left of the gopher's little ratface,
So far more sensitive than a song-thrush's face
When you see it up close,
Blows on a prairie somewhere.
Minnesota's dead animals are too many
For me to remember.
Yet I live with and caress the body
Of the sunfish. One out of many,
I caught him out of sheer accidental daring
As he tried to hide in the sunlight.
Leaping toward the Marsh Lake Dam,
He pretended he was merely a little splinter
In the general noon.
I knew better about his life.
Sweet plum, little shadow, he feeds my brother,
My own shadow.

The Fox At Eype

He knows that all dogs bounding here and there, from the little vales all the way to the cliff-meadows and Thorncombe Beacon and beyond, are domestically forbidden to kill him. So every evening just before the end of twilight he emerges softly from the hedge across the lane and sits elegantly till darkness, gazing, with a certain weary amusement, into the middle distance of the sea.

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Bodily Harm

Margaret Atwood

Who knows what goes on in their heads? said Jocasta. They were well into the second carafe of wine. Not me, I've stopped even trying. It used to be women that were so mysterious, remember? Well, not any more, now it's men. Me, I'm an open book. All I want is a good enough time, no hassle, a few laughs, a little how-you-say romance, I'll take the violins if they're going around, dim lights, roses, fantastic sex, let *them* scrape the paté off the rug in the morning, is that too much to ask? Are they afraid of my first name or something, is that it? Remember when we all batted our eyes and pretended not to know what dirty jokes meant and crossed our legs a lot and they chased around like pigs after a truffle and God did they complain. Frigid, cock teaser, professional virgin, remember those? Remember panty girdles, remember *falsies*, remember Peter Pan brassières, in the front seat after the formal, with your wires digging into his chest?

Rennie didn't remember these things too well. But she didn't say so, she didn't want to remind Jocasta about her age.

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There's probably men still around who don't think a woman's a woman unless she feels like a car grille or the insides of a toaster, said Jocasta. Not the back seat though, God forbid the word should get around you were an easy out.

Well, so two months ago this man, a nice enough man, nice shoulders, said why didn't we go out for dinner. I've known him a while, I like him okay, he's fine, nothing wrong with him, not ultra bright but not a nylon stocking murderer either, and I've always felt I wouldn't mind, you know. If the occasion should arise. Well, it looked as if it was arising, pardon the pun, so I tarted myself up, nothing too obvious, I just bought this fabulous black knitted sheath for the store, remember bat wings?

So out we go, he was paying it seems, though I did offer, it's a new place over on Church, not too many of those damn asparagus ferns shedding down your back, I had the quails, which was a mistake, gnawing those tiny bones and trying to look soignée. But everything was going fine, a lot of eye contact, we talked about his career, he's into real estate, doing up downtown houses. All he has to do is beat off the Marxists, the ones that rent rather than owning. The ones that own don't care, it jacks up their property values.

So I admire him some and he asks me back to his place, and we sit on the broadloom drinking white wine, and he puts on a record, Bartók, which I thought was a little heavy for the occasion but never mind, and he wants to talk about himself some more. Okay, I don't mind listening, but all this time he doesn't touch me. What's the matter, you think I have vaginal warts, I want to ask him, but I'm doing some serious listening, it's all about his two business partners and how they can't express anger. I personally think it's just dandy when people can't express anger, there's enough of it in the world already.

So nothing happens and finally I say, I'm really tired, this certainly has been nice but I've got to get home, and he says, Why don't you stay the night? Funny you should ask, I think, though I don't say it, so we go into the bedroom and I swear to God he turns around so his *back* is to me and he takes off all his clothes. I can't believe it, I stand there with my mouth open,

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and before you know it he's all tucked into his side of the bed, he was practically wearing striped flannelet pyjamas. He asks if I want the light on or off, and by this time I'm so freaked I say Off, so he turns it off and there I am, taking my clothes off all by myself in the dark. If I was smart I'd have left them on and headed fast for the Down elevator, but you know me, Little Mary Sunshine, ever hopeful, so I climb into the bed, expecting to be embraced passionately, maybe he's just afraid of the light, but he says Good night and turns over and goes to sleep!

Talk about feeling like an asshole. Now if a girl did that, what would she be called? There I was, horny as hell from looking at his *shoulders* for about five hours, and he's sleeping away like a baby. So I got up and spent the night on his sofa.

In the morning he waltzes in, all bright and shiny in his brown velour dressing gown with the monogram on the pocket, with two glasses of fresh orange juice, and he says, Where did *you* go last night? When I woke up this morning you weren't there.

He hadn't even noticed, he hadn't noticed all night that I was gone.

I'm sorry, I said, but I think we have a semantic problem. A problem in communications, or maybe it's linguistics. What does *spending the night* usually mean to you? I mean, I'm not knocking the orange juice but I don't have to spend the night on the sofa to get it, I can squeeze it myself, you know what I mean?

Well, it turns out he's having an identity crisis, boy, am I sick of those. Before this he's only made it with younger, dumber chicks, women who're easy to impress, he says, and he's never tried it with someone like me, notice he meant old and wise, like an owl maybe. If you have to be a bird, which would you rather be, a chick or an owl? He's not sure someone like me would think he has anything to offer besides sex, and he wants to be valued for himself, whatever that is. Chin*ese*! He wants a long-term meaningful relationship. I can tell he was a bed-wetter as a child. Maybe still is for all I know.

I'm sitting there with my hair not brushed and I really have to pee, but I don't want to interrupt him because he obviously

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finds this important, and I'm thinking, I've heard this before, only it used to be women saying it to men. I can't believe it! And I'm thinking, do I want a long-term meaningful relationship with this guy? And then I'm thinking, *does* he have anything to offer besides sex?

Well, the answer was No. But that didn't used to matter, did it? How come it matters all of a sudden? Why do we have to start respecting their *minds*? Who keeps changing the rules, them or us? You know how many times that's happened to me since then? Three more times! It's an epidemic! What do they *want*?

My theory is that when sex was such a big deal, above the waist, below the waist, with stages of achievement marked on it like the United Appeal thermometer, they wanted it that way because you could measure it, you could win, scoring, you know? Our team against their team. Getting away with it. One in the teeth for Mummy. So we said, you want it, fine, we want it too, let's get together, and all of a sudden millions of pricks went limp. *Nationwide!* That's my theory. The new scoring is *not* scoring. Just so long as you keep control. They don't want love and understanding and meaningful relationships, they still want sex, but only if they can *take* it. Only if you've got something to lose, only if you struggle a little. It helps if you're eight years old, one way or another. You follow me?

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Danielle Sarréra
translated by Lydia Davis

The Knight of the Trepan

The Knight of the Trepan is Christ, who lives in me and who passes through my skull day after day like a needle. He wears leather breeches that resemble English silks. His face is encased in a helmet that shows only two glass eyes and a mouth with moving wet lips. He bends me over against the table and rapes me. While this is happening, I read the Gospel according to St. John, which gives such a good account of how this man is going to die some day. The thought of it makes me come, and Christ, believing that his sex alone is the cause of my explosion, covers me with kisses that bloom like mildew on my lips (the smell of incense and a garden under the rain). When he goes away, I trace in the air the sign of the fire that will presently turn this noble soul into a vulgar old man with stale teeth, bleary eyes, and a limping gait.

"Ah," he says to me sometimes, "I swear that I love you, princess of my oblivion, you are destined to pursue me, you are my equal and far better than the Virgin."

But the Knight of the Trepan does not understand that I am the terrible pregnant Virgin whom the Mystic speaks of so joyfully, and that in this heavy belly a child is not growing, but is being reabsorbed, a child whose cry would be enough to deafen the universe. When he has changed himself into a pin, then we shall see which of us possesses virtue and innocence, which of us is master of destiny, which of us is the other's chasuble.

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That morning, Antigone went off on tiptoe. That morning, Antigone, having turned up her petticoats so as to let her knees shine in the sunlight of that ineffable season, opened the door facing Montmartre and mingled with the Sunday crowd. That morning, Antigone opened her eyes on a dry world, and dipped her fingers in the consecrated water of a tragedy which attained one of the summits of thought that morning. That morning, at the river's edge, Antigone began to laugh, her laugh was softer than the night and deeper than Hell, and very calmly fell asleep without one dream in the sickening mob of the perjurer. That morning, Antigone left her father's house, threw the key into the Rhône and into the Saône, and when everything was as clean as a kitchen on Saturday night, she squatted in the grass and gave herself up to her creative follies, whose preamble has the form of a sex and whose conclusion can only be read in the stars at the moment they explode and fall. That morning, Antigone went out with her hair dishevelled, her arms crossed, her eyes as keen as swords; and the Lord of the Trepan (death take his soul!) watched her run away, his eyes bathed in tears. That morning—yes, that morning, Antigone went out alone that morning. And that was the beginning of the miracle.

I am writing the third Gospel, with my left hand. Because this is destined never to see the light—just as the owl is condemned to know only the night, and if ever it ventures out at high noon to sit on the roof of the man I thought I loved, it is sure to turn into quite laughable dust. But whether you look to the East or the West, what will you say—you who mumble prayers—the day when such a moment of the spirit finally seizes you by the throat, though you haven't wanted to believe in it at all, and, as you are pulled by the feet toward the furnace, your various pretty heads resemble the gargoyles of Notre Dame? I look on your fixed eyes with great arrogance, knowing how incomplete you are, and how vulgar—you who

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have managed to turn money into the pinnacle of destinies, and my dear Knight of the Trepan into a ridiculous little naked man on a cross in Israel. Yet here I am, ready to bless, refusing to bless, capable of undoing death in your throats that are cut at the level of thought. Here I am, glad and wretched, triumphant and defeated, obstinate—in a word—and liberated! Glory be to my enigmatic horse who knows very well where he is going! Glory be to my childish form which tomorrow will harden into a burning star (a true Kashmir sun!). Glory be to my sex, which repudiates and is never tired—this diamond, this garment of fur, this irrefutable onyx, where the swine have come to surfeit their souls! Glory be to death, which I have very sagely exuded in my funereal labyrinth! Glory be to all those who, like me, have known how to ignore the marbles tossed beneath our prancing legs by the many turns of fortune. Amen.

When I contemplate my sex, reddened by the wind and by walking, in a mirror bordered with precious stones, I would like to be able to offer myself to anyone at all for the sake of a great love. But the love of the Knight of the Trepan is in itself a mountain of limitless satisfactions. He makes me open my legs just the way he likes, in his rapture says to me:

"You are the pleasure girl I have chosen to refresh me and burn me on the Calvary; I beg you, creature of my father, open your legs and lick your sex."

I lick my sex, bending over like a contortionist, and it is well worth it! Because (I may as well stop hiding it) I am never happy during an act of love; I pretend to be happy so that the other will be happy. And when he is happy, I curse him for using my thighs and my arms like this in order to think himself ineffable. I see him twist with pleasure on the sheets in the closed room. I see him take hold of himself under the arms and cry out that he is being cleaved in two.

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I see him scratch the ground like a dog burying its vomit. But I am too great, a spectacle like that does not in the least overwhelm me. I call for help from my lucid one—far-sighted one!—and I kiss her between the eyes, in that place where her imagination bends, and becomes soft and a little disgusting.

Have pity, my God, on this woman who begins to cry out with pleasure under the blows of her lover. Have pity, my God, on this sex, so weak, and on this breast, so tenacious; on this smile disposed to injure me and on these too tender arms in which I go to sleep like a happy child. Have pity, my God, on this woman with satiny hair on her temples who dreams of innocence. Have pity, my God, and you, Our Lady, have pity, you who in your mind have known harsh and feeble hands that softly kneaded you and loved you even as they condemned you to carry God with you in your meanderings.

I do not believe in you but I use your word because it is clear that your word is a sharp steel and that for these sated creatures what matters most is to believe in a dog who speaks well. So give them some fire to devour! They will believe they are drinking the alcohol of the poor wretch. But it isn't true at all, God of light, this not even one tenth of the pleasures of your Hell!

Enough! I refuse to stand firm on the earth! Set your heart in the chasm of my dust. I will pardon you if you dare to do it.

My little Danielle, let me caress your legs; let me move up as far as your thighs, soft as velvet. Let me play with your sex. But you are cold as a statue, girl of emptiness, great miraculous sister in whom my caresses come to know death and put down roots. Poor, dear, very dear little Danielle, I ask of you only a crime that kills no one but the monster I see in you.

Here lies the child whom the child did not want.

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Guillaume Apollinaire
translated by Richard Wilbur

Mirabeau Bridge

Under the Mirabeau Bridge there flows the Seine
Must I recall
Our loves recall how then
After each sorrow joy came back again

Let night come on bells end the day
The days go by me still I stay

Hands joined and face to face let's stay just so
While underneath
The bridge of our arms shall go
Eternal gazes in their weary flow

Let night come on bells end the day
The days go by me still I stay

All love goes by as water to the sea
All love goes by
How slow life seems to me
How violent the hope of love can be

Let night come on bells end the day
The days go by me still I stay

The days the weeks pass by beyond our ken
Neither time past
Nor love comes back again
Under the Mirabeau Bridge there flows the Seine

Let night come on bells end the day
The days go by me still I stay

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Portfolio

Six Collages
Letters from Abroad

Duncan Hannah

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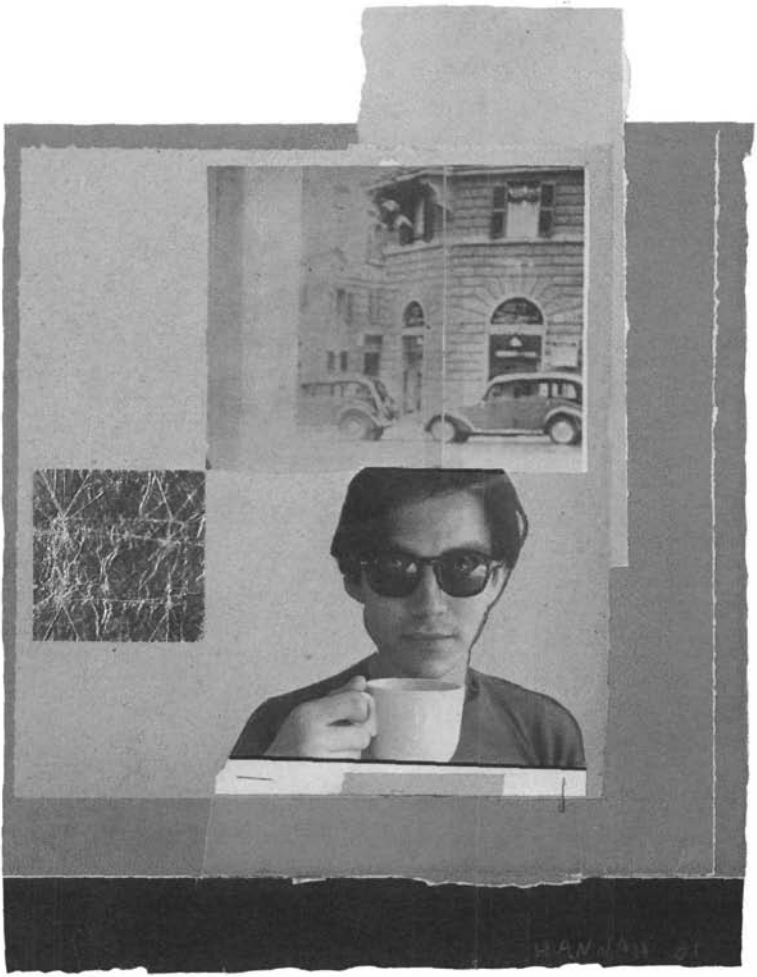

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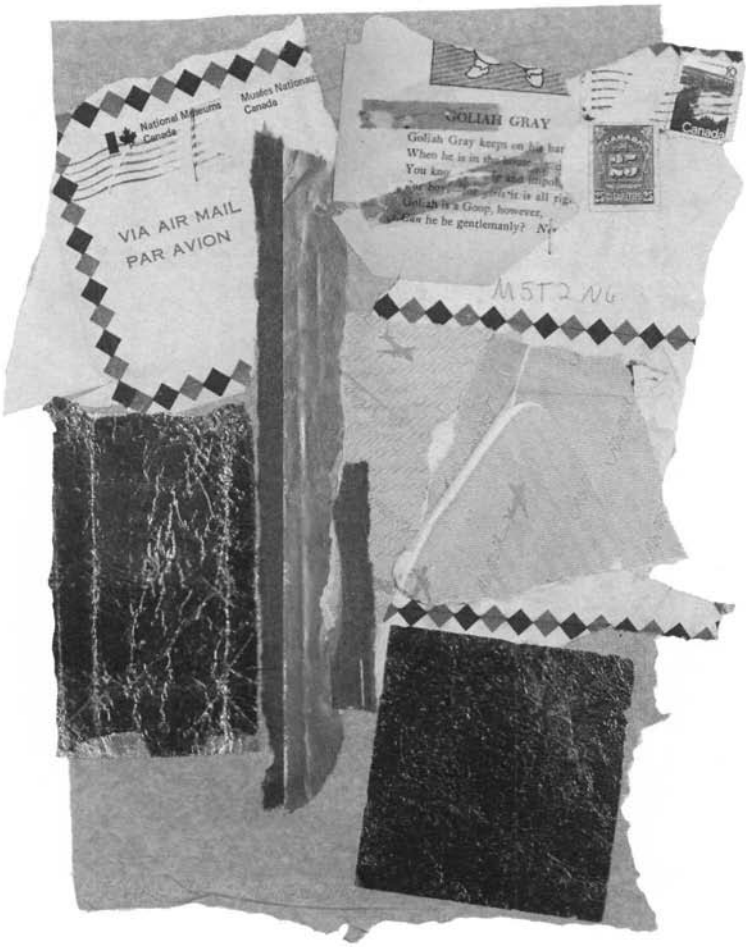

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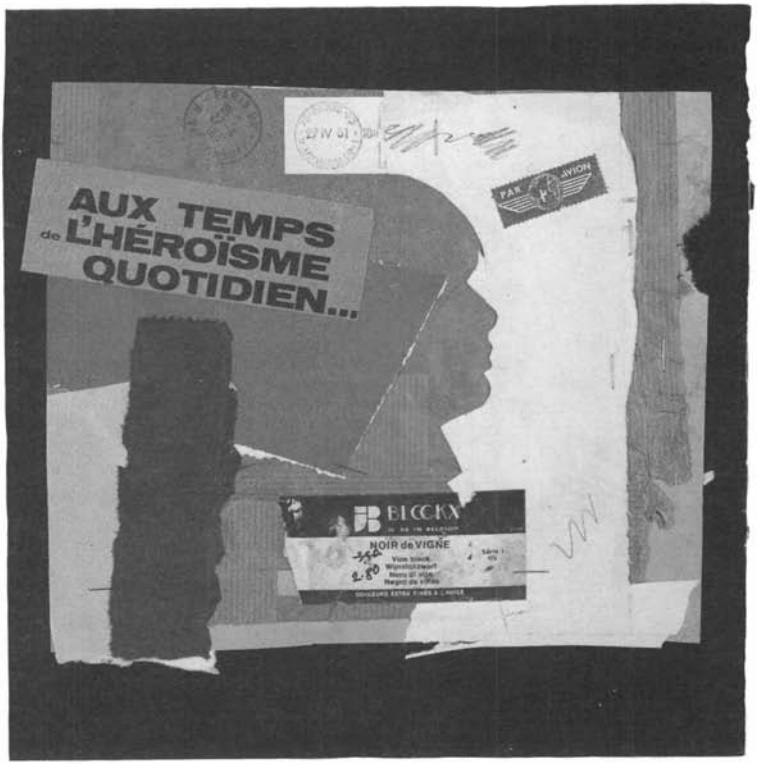

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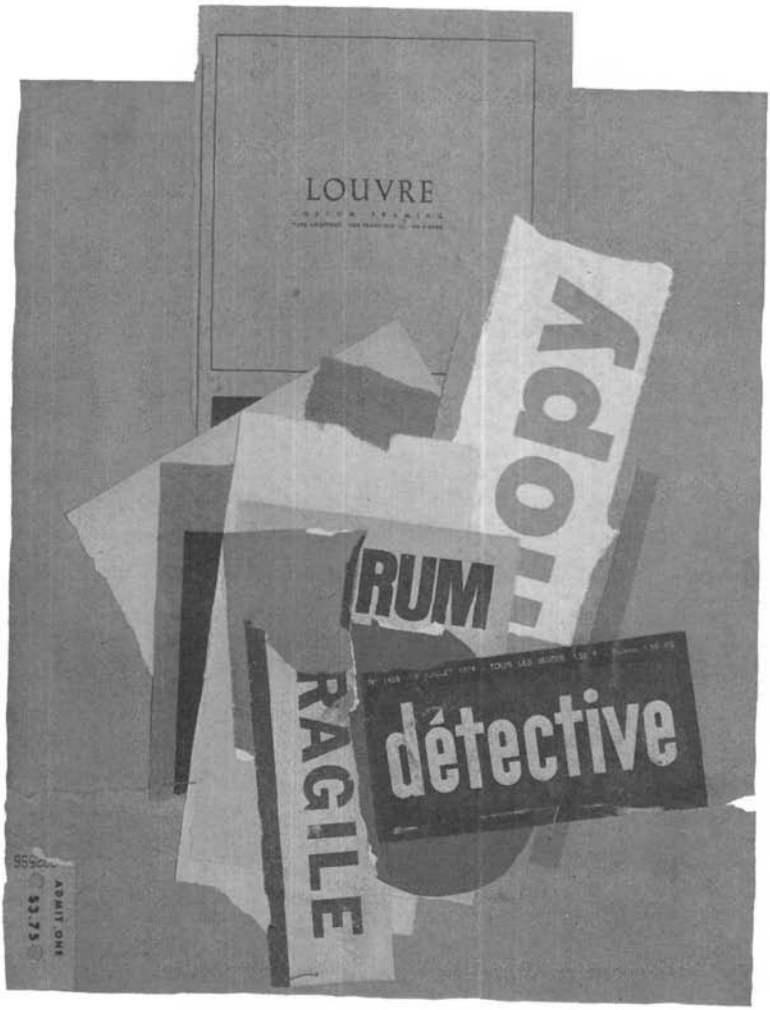

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Moinous, Nam, and Dostoevsky

Raymond Federman

Hey you guys wake up, we've started all over again, but this time it's going to be serious, the real story, no more evasions, procrastinations, and you won't believe this, it begins in the future

no I'm not kidding, well the near future, can't stray too far from the present, and besides there is a certain logic to keep in mind, a certain urgency too

what do you mean science-fiction, not at all, it's not because one wanders into the future that

call it exploratory or better yet extemporaneous fiction, that's right, question of more space, room to expand forward and backward, a matter of distanciation if you wish, room to turn imagination loose on the spot and shift perspectives unexpectedly, sounds interesting, damn right

but no futuristic crap, I mean pseudoscientific bullshit, space

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warfare, fake theories of probabilities, unsolvable equations, strange creatures from other planets, ludicrous busy bodies with pointed ears, wings instead of arms or wheels instead of legs, none of that, a way to look at the self, at humanity, from a potential point of view

premembering the future rather than remembering the past, but no gadgetry, no crass emotionless robots that crush the shit out of you when you don't submit to their notion of life, bloodless robots that take over your basic human functions, no none of that infantilism, at least within reason, no invasions of earth by superbrains, spaceship battles in the galaxies, worlds that collide, nothing spuriously progressive or regressive in this story, nothing prophetic or moralistic either, quasimoralistic in the sense that things will get worse in the future if we don't stop messing around with ecology or the natural order of things, no, just a simple moving story

it begins in the year 2000, or just before, the story, the night before to be exact, new year's eve 1999

the first sentence goes like this, If the night passes quietly tomorrow he will have reached the 21st century and be on his way

nothing extraordinary about that, nothing earth shaking, but I rather like that sentence, and besides don't you think it's a better beginning than Once upon a time there will be

it came to me during a sleepless night, and I have many of these lately with the way things are going in my mental stratosphere, no not stratosplit, stratosphere, just an image, it's not often that such a perfect sentence comes to one's mind, that's why I decided to exploit it, explore it as far as I could, to the outer limits of imagination, within the possibilities of language of course, and it goes on telling the story of this guy, an old fart eighty-two years old now who is being deported to the space colonies

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it's 9:00 p.m. now, on this new year's eve 1999, there is still hope to prevent our old man's departure, Moinous and Nam, my two faithful co-workers, have been gone a long time to investigate the matter, something must be going on, they left hurriedly with the appropriate facial expression, the proper mask of gleefulness, compulsory these days, they had a thought, an idea, had it simultaneously

do you think, Moinous, that perhaps his association with

damn, I was going to say the same thing, Moinous cried out interrupting Nam as though he had read his mind

that, that perhaps his association with us may have had something to do with his being deported to the space colonies

exactly

and they took off like two nervous stallions to explore this possibility while I remain here rummaging through my notes, they must be at the spaceport by now

9:00 o'clock, there is still hope, three more hours before our old man is cut off from our life, yes there is still hope, especially when one remembers how, on December 22, 1849, the Tsar of Russia, Nicholas I, brimming with vanity commuted Dostoevsky's death sentence at the very moment when he was facing the firing squad

true, Dostoevsky was deported to Siberia after that, how humiliating, but what the hell, he survived, he came back, came back to give us *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *The Possessed*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*, that's better than nothing, no one has ever returned from the space colonies, no one so far, to my knowledge

but as long as there is time there is hope, or is it the reverse,

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three hours still before the departure, before the deportees are launched into space, better get my ass going

remember the scene, how often has it been described to us, here let's go back and reread the biographers on the subject, I'm sure they won't mind if we borrow a bit from them, hell it's part of the technique

there were twenty-one of them, condemned to death, they stood in front of a wooden platform covered with black cloth, Dostoevsky looked around, he recognized the orange walls of the guards' regimental barracks and the five golden cupolas of the massive cathedral, this was the square where the Semyonovsky regiment had its drill and parades, the condemned men were lined up at the rampart, there they were, thin, pale, unkempt, poets and jurists, engineers and officers, teachers and journalists, an entire Petrashevsky Friday, encircled by hand-picked troops in parade uniforms and mounted gendarmerie, with the military Governor-General of Petersburg, the Chief of Police, the Commanders of the Life Guards and the Tsar's chic aides-de-camp standing stiff and bored at their head, what a spectacle it must have been

the prisoners were led to the short staircase leading up to the platform and climbed the slippery steps while rifles darted upward with a precise clang and drums beat a nervous rat-tat-tat

Dostoevsky stumbled on the steps and almost fell, an old man behind him grabbed him by the arm, Careful Fyodor, this is not the time to break a leg, we still have a long way to go

the final scene of the ritual had begun, an unbearable thought flashed through Dostoevsky's mind, What if I were not to die, what if my life were given back to me, what an eternity it would be

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and then the auditor spoke, Having examined the case as presented by the army judiciary commission, the auditoriat-general finds all the accused guilty of planning to overthrow the state system and sentences them all to death by the firing squad

So be it, His Majesty the Emperor of Russia had written in his own hand on the sentence

so be it, the accused had been dressed in loose gowns of coarse linen with pointed hoods attached and long sleeves that reached almost to the ground, suddenly the sound of lilting, insolent, prolonged laughter came from the scaffold, everyone turned to look, the heads of the soldiers swiveling on stiff shoulders like those of mechanical toys, Petrashevsky was shaking with uncontrollable laughter, Gentlemen, laughter was choking him, how ridiculous we must look in these clown's shirts

Dostoevsky was in the second row, next to the bearded old man who had helped him up the stairs, it could have been our old man, for all I know, or else his great-grandfather, after all we are extensions of the dead, in life as well as in fiction, they were both trying to look as contemptuous of authority as the rest of their comrades, Have courage old man, Dostoevsky whispered, look at them with scorn, I am, replied the old man, but like Dostoevsky he was listening to his heart beat

then the first three were called, Petrashevsky, Mombelli, Grigoryev, the three white ghosts descended from the platform, dragged their chained feet toward the wall of the rampart, Hoods down over the eyes, they were ordered, Petrashevsky shook the white hood off his face, threw his head backward, I am not afraid to look death in the eyes, he cried

the three were bound to grey posts with ropes, their arms

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pulled behind their backs and the long sleeves of the death shirts tied into a double knot, I have no more than a minute to live, Dostoevsky thought, his heart stood still in anticipation

Aim, the platoon took aim, it was a fearful moment indeed, the old man reached for Dostoevsky's hand, the terrible wait lasted for a full half minute, Why don't they fire, what's keeping them

one of the Tsar's aides-de-camp was galloping across the parade ground, the sound of the horse's hooves on the cobblestones ringing the final death knell

all this of course had been carefully rehearsed, staged for the perfect melodramatic effect, the death sentences had already been commuted four days earlier, but the accused didn't know that

Let the swine suffer the agony of death to the last possible moment, the Tsar was rubbing his gloved hands together and pacing the floor angrily when he spoke these words, four days earlier in his palace, yes let them face their death and then give them life again, humiliate them with life in a grandiose gesture of magnanimity

and now General Sumarokov read from the sealed packet the aide-de-camp had just handed him, Retired Engineer-Lieutenant Fyodor Dostoevsky, having read the report submitted to Him with loyal feelings, His Majesty generously commutes your death sentence and orders your deportation to penal servitude in fortresses for four years, and after that four more years of military service as a common soldier in the Emperor's Caucasian Corps

the General read each commutation, twenty-one of them, in a resounding dispassionate tone of voice, I'm skipping details here

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the prisoners did not speak, did not let out cries of joy or sighs of relief, no, they stood calm, contemptuous and scornful

it was a good half hour later when General Sumarokov finally read the last commutation, By His Majesty's order the convict Butashevich-Petrashevsky shall set out for Siberia directly from the execution site accompanied by a gendarme and a courier

I wish to take leave of my comrades, Petrashevsky said to the Commandant, and swaying in his chains he dragged his fettered feet clumsily from one man to the next, kissed each one and bade him farewell, then he faced his companions, Do not lose heart, my friends, let them put us in irons, these chains are a priceless bracelet fashioned for us by the wisdom of the West and the spirit of the age which penetrates everywhere, and placed on us by our love of mankind, two guards pulled him away

Dostoevsky had tears in his eyes, what an unbearable eternity, he thought, then as the prisoners were led away from the scaffold, he said to the old man, Do not despair old man, certainly we shall all rise again, certainly we shall see each other and shall tell each other with joy and gladness all that has happened

with these prophetic words Dostoevsky unknowingly had already written the end of *The Brothers Karamazov*, and so the old man replied while embracing Dostoevsky, Ah, how splendid it will be

later that day, back in his cell after the ordeal of this mock execution, awaiting the moment of his deportation, Dostoevsky wrote a letter to his brother Mikhail, I'm quoting here from this immortal document

My brother, I do not feel despondent and have not lost

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heart, life is life everywhere, life is in ourselves and not outside us, there will be men beside me, and the important thing is to be a man among men and to remain a man always, whatever the misfortunes, not to despair and not to fall, that is the aim of life, that is its purpose, I realize this now, the idea has entered into my flesh and my blood, yes that is the truth, that head which created, which lived the higher life of art, which experienced and had grown accustomed to the necessities of the spirit, that head has already been severed from my shoulders, what remains is memory and images, those I created and those I have not yet given form to, true, they will corrode me, but I have still got my heart and the same flesh and blood which can love and suffer and pity and remember, and that is also life, never before have I felt such abundant and healthy reserves of spiritual life in me as now

that letter, full of optimism and unshakeable faith in his vocation and in his future renascence, could have been written by our old man, yes that letter or one very much like it might still be written by our old man today, before midnight, on this sad new year's eve 1999, or perhaps, at this very moment, as he sits in that antechamber of departure, he is speaking the same words, or words like those of Dostoevsky to my faithful co-workers who must be standing next to him in awkward grief, and who will report these words to me later when they return

but that's Dostoevsky's story, and he survived, our old man's story is something else, just as sad, yes, just as gruesome, perhaps even more, for he too missed an appointment with death, without knowing it, oh so long ago, that day in 1942, when he stood in one of the communal shower rooms of Auschwitz with some fifty others like him, humiliated by their nakedness, fifty rickety pale bluish bodies already half into moribundity, that day when they all stood looking alike, familiar and familial, each old man in that pitiful group resembling his father, and each old woman

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resembling his mother, was it an hallucination, and the others too, the younger ones, all of them looking like him, like his sisters and the brothers he never had, fifty depersonalized replicas of himself standing in shame, covering their sex with their hands, shivering in the cold on that exceptional day when, against the very rules of the camp, men and women were marched together into the shower room, as a mocking coed spectacle, and waited for the water to spill on their bodies, or whatever came out of those shower heads to cleanse the Dreckigen Juden

but that day, for some unknown reason, the water did not flow on these bluish bodies, nothing happened, did the Camp Commandant, or perhaps even the Führer himself, in a wild stroke of generosity, commute the death sentences for that day, as a playful gesture, for the fun of it, or was the water frozen in the pipes, the gas solidified, but unlike the mock execution of Dostoevsky and his friends, it was never revealed whether there had been a commutation or not, or if the whole scene had been cynically pre-arranged, staged, rehearsed, calculated for perfect melodramatic effect

as the Jews were led back to their barracks, walking naked in the snow, the old man also composed a letter, in his mind, a message which, of course, he never had a chance to put on paper, and therefore never sent to anyone, but it began this way

Something happened today, I do not know what it is, an end, or perhaps a beginning, I do not feel discouraged, broken, only confused, debased, what is certain is that there are no principles in this world, only events, no laws, only circumstances, how ridiculous we must have looked in our naked expectancy

and later, his death behind him, his death temporarily postponed, perhaps even cancelled, he wondered, did it happen to me or have I imagined the whole scene,

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something happened to somebody, yes to the others, millions of others, to my father, to my mother, my sisters, to all of them, xxxx out, but not to me, not to me, that ultimate moment of degradation, the unspeakable event

during the night, after he folded his tattooed wrist under his head, he dreamed, and in his dream a giant hoof struck his double face as he saw himself kneel before himself to suck the blood from his mythical flesh where dirty nails had scratched away the remains of an unspeakable numerical name, erased the fragments of his story, and cut an ugly wound into the pigments of his race

and so that day, in 1942, he too like Dostoevsky was humiliated with an excess of life, he too suffered the insult of survival, and yet he could not tell if it had really happened to him

years later, whenever the old man remembered that scene, or replayed it in his mind, as every human being, every adult must have replayed that scene at least once in his life, must have imagined how it felt to be standing in the gas chamber, or in front of the firing squad, yes once, whether or not one had been there, the old man would hear the words of Maimonides echo in his head, Every Jew is like an actor playing a Jew, each gives his own interpretation of the past, and indeed the old man understood then that one must always live from a sense that the end, the apocalypse has already happened, a sense that nothing has yet begun, that man has not yet been created, that everything is on the verge of starting again, yes each time he replayed that ugly scene in his mind he understood that it was now possible to start anew, every day, and to confirm this notion one of his writer friends, his name escapes me now, once told him how, in this spirit of perpetual new beginnings, he had written a story which opens with a writer who, in order to get started, shoots himself, his blood hits the wall and spells out this message, It is important to begin when everything is already over

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in a way this postponement of the end, this transition from lessness to endlessness, this shift from ultimate to penultimate or even to antepenultimate, seems to adumbrate a greater mystery, a greater horror too, and this may be the reason why our old man is being expelled from this world, banished from this planet, after all one cannot wander forever in a borrowed land, live a deferred life, but of course I am only speculating here

perhaps nothing happened that day, it was not like that, how do I know, I wasn't there, no I was lucky, indeed I have never stood in front of a firing squad, nor have I ever been, and hopefully will never be deported, let's just say that I was fortunate, though I could easily be in the old man's place now, and he in mine in this room writing this story

that would greatly facilitate matters, for I already know, or let's say I have a notion of how this story might end, Moinous and Nam would come to see me in my antechamber of departure where I would be sitting resigned, the buzzing of my past in my ears, a faithful old dog crouched like a sphinx next to me, and they would ask, with the necessary tone of urgency, Why are you being sent to the space colonies

and me, at the last moment, just as the huge metallic doors would slide open in the great hall of departure and reveal the impatient giant spaceship pointing skyward on the launching pad, I would tell them quietly, there are no such things as the space colonies

what, they would cry out totally mystified, you mean to say

yes of course, it's not true, maybe in the future, in the far future, there will be such places, but for the time being it's not possible, I mean technologically, it's a lie, a myth, I have invented the space colonies so that I can be sent there, imaginatively speaking

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but why, why

to get rid of the burden of my past, you might say

but then, they would ask disconcerted, what do they do with all the people, all those poor devils who are sent, who have been sent to those colonies for years now, since they were established in 1994, supposedly, and what about these people here, today, including yourself

oh that's not a lie, that's a fact, a reality, they are dumped into space, yes into space, into the vast expanse of receding space, like human garbage, detritus, and the bodies float, they float away into gaslessness

wow, that would make a striking ending for this story, a bit too sad perhaps, and too melodramatic, but what an ending, all those bodies floating in space toward the edges of the universe, millions and millions of decomposed bodies speeding backward into the great cunt of space, disappearing into the black hole of the original Big Bang, millions of bodies twinkling like tiny yellow stars, except that it won't work, the situation is otherwise

in reality I am sitting here writing this story, or contemplating how it will be written eventually, while the old man waits in the antechamber of departure, and we still don't know why he is there

of course one can speculate, as we have been doing now for quite some time, and indeed what can one do but speculate, speculate, as my friend Sam used to say, until one hits on the happy speculation, when all goes silent, and comes to an end, it will be because the words have been said, those it behooved to say, no need to know which, no means of knowing which, they'll be there somewhere, in the heap, in the torrent, not necessarily the last, they have to be ratified by the proper authority, that takes time, damn right, but

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what better way to pass the time

perhaps my old man himself has also imagined the space colonies in order to be virtually deported there, invented them in spite of me, and in spite of Moinous and Nam, to get rid of the guilt of having survived the Holocaust, I wouldn't put it past him, after all does it really matter if one was there or not, does it really matter in the long run if one experienced the gas chambers or if one merely imagines how it must have been, the Holocaust was a universal affair, a total affair in which all mankind was implicated and is still implicated, therefore to speak of that sad affair, in life or in fiction, in an effort to come to terms with its incomprehensibility, must also be a collective undertaking, and naturally the same can be said of the space colonies, real or imagined, it doesn't make much difference if it is he or I in that antechamber of departure, after a while we all become interchangeable

we are all displaced persons surviving in a strange land, in life as well as in fiction, and so why not ask, even if it is in vain, as it is asked in The Book of Questions, Old Man tell us the story of your country, but unlike Yukel who answers, I have no country, I am Yukel Serafi, and my life is the story, our old man would have to answer, making a crucial inversion of the terms, I have no country, the story is my life

and I could say the same of myself even though I am only a middleman in this undertaking, but unfortunately the potential readers of this story may jump to the conclusion, false and hasty as it may be, that this story is autobiographical in the sense that it tells in a sort of camouflaged way the life of the author, namely me disguised as a nameless old man, projected into a fictitious future space, as in fact one such reader has already suggested upon seeing what has been told so far of the old man's story, but this is not true, I assure you, for if it were so then indeed I would be the one sitting in that antechamber of departure, remembering how

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I imagined the space colonies in order to be deported there, while the old man, or someone like him, would be here in this room writing me, inventing and twisting my life into premembrances, distorting my self, my many selves into a strange time loop, why pretend otherwise, and were this to be so then there would definitely be something wrong with the twofold vibration that sustains this extemporaneous story

of course all this is pure speculation, a necessary digression to pass the time while Moinous and Nam are out there, investigating the situation, and perhaps they will return soon with the truth, the real story, and we shall know once and for all if the old man can be saved, but meanwhile that gives me time to put some order here, clean my typewriter, change the ribbon, cut my nails, consult my notes

they must be at the spaceport by now.

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Sandra McPherson

Night Vision

fragment for Lucretius and others

Heaven bribes me;
But for a dream
I have only to lie down.
I am the judge
And sleep shameless and just
Among perfect examples,
Scripts, idols, panoramas, mazes.
A speech-cure,
Sleep warrens laughter
And bulges a snore. "When I allowed myself
Images and pompous expressions,
A god warned me in my sleep,
Censured my writings,
Brought me back to a natural style."
Perhaps, but didn't his eyes strain and leap?
Could he read, his hand
On skids, trying to write with the eyes
Shut? Even Helen Keller
Couldn't feel the pages
She felt lovingly
In the great book dreamt on her knee.
Night is
Black mail. Blackout
Within blackout, then suddenly
Cerulean lapstrakes, raspberry-
Colored houses; the heaven below,
Snobbish if wistful,
Jealous of being remembered,
Wounded when I leave it each morning.

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Years of berceuses
Hummed for love of the nightmare,
Frisky, arcadian, ponytailed.
It has us bedridden.
The old dream of being lost in insulation
Turns inability to find you
Or a place to make love.
The hug, the pit of the stomach, salivation—
I convince the horse
There are pleasures in being human.
Young, I was crushed by a giant;
Now each attentive nonesuch
Looks where he is going.
Serious wishes: to own
Or be enthralled; be fugitive,
Sought, to hide
In majesty; be guilt-pleased,
Act selfish, receptive, intense.
For buildings to need maps;
For scenery to be magnetic,
Light steep; for graves'
Cumulonimbi to circulate;
For shoes to be round-toed
And money extinct.
For we'd rather not bargain
For pre-owned dreams, wizened hands,
Odds, lumber, cat scratches, weeds,
Less than would fill a pipe,
Worshipful blending though they make
Of all we have known and desired.
Start afresh, fatigued.
If it's true
I dream some work I did today,
Then that work must be beautiful,
All day's dismay
Laboratory of the chemist
Overcome by inventing
The first ether.

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Hugh Seidman

The Mother

Ultimate, white-haired
bandaged at the eyes like judgement
you lie at the hospital stainless faucets and the pipes
under a TV bolted to the ceiling

Though in 1946 at my aunt's when I was six
and as when I had been born
you came back from the mental ward in brown curls
and white anklets and blue pinafore
to the lavender hydrangeas

But yesterday on West Street like a supplicant
I crossed the cobbles where the rain
struck a woman under the girders
who raised her white shirt
for the truckers on the docks

So that again I sensed that son
whom his cousins had taunted to sullenness

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for whatever the psychiatrists said
of you who could not care for him
ugly or beautiful as the prostitute

Though of course
I was ludicrous to compare her to you—
you who had warned me never to open the door to strangers
who had raved that men would kill you

You to whom I offer the water and the chapstick
for lips dry as a grandmother's
that curse your nurse and cataract
but bless my father past anger
forty years from the electroshock

And then you press your palms to your breasts
and tell me to forget
though you do not say what—

And then you are yourself, abstract
blank as the prehistoric groove in the cave
as if men had had a purpose like my hands
though I could not appease nor smooth nor heal you

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Siri Hustvedt

Weather Markings

The list of small deformities passed unrecorded
In the stupor of heredity,
Like our weather,
Clouding over the tiny barn
Where he said he saw Judas hanging
Behind the old tractor
But it was the Swensby boy in a blue and yellow plaid shirt
And no note.
He went screaming Judas into the cornfield
And couldn't be hushed until evening.
Oh God the failure of prayers in the idiot days
Of summer behind the goldenrod,
Dusty on my hands; scattering doubts like the dandelions
Turned white and blown to seed—
More doubts and more prayers
Asking God not to hide his face:
The face of our weather, immense and old,
Covering the sky with clouds to smother the moon:
A small oval, like the small pale face of Jesus
In the blue book on the table with one unsteady leg.
Look at the sky, Marit,
Look at the bland green behind the leaves' paralysis
In the minutes when panic is suspended
In an estranged color,
Before the cellar door is raised
And we descend into the air
Preserving canned goods,
Before the prayers in the damp on the cold concrete
And long before the rain.
Inga with a withered hand waves it over the uprooted maple
Where the swing hung for twelve years

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And where we played the fields were an ocean
And the tree a ship,
Before the mosquitoes came at about nine
And we fled in to cards or stories upstairs:
Matching suits as one moth tries the screen
And flies for the bulb
A puny tremor of white over the grey mattress
Where you sat naked on a Friday that summer.
I fingered the scar on your hip in the empty house
And whispered anyway:
Our clandestine music in muggy weather
During a walk
Past the still green grapes and the clothesline
With one pair of socks and an apron;
Belated spectres of surprise in the night,
Belonging to no one, except the heat
And our tipsy inclination.
Those hours were unmartyred,
Almost unspent,
Requiring the same effort as a dream
When the scenery becomes illegible,
And I forgot the ache of familiarity in the outlines
Of the rainwater barrels and the pump
And I concentrated on the stars,
The dot to dot of the big and little dipper.
But they began to die as the storm
Gathered for the drowning.
Turn off the lights so I can't see your face,
Hide your prints made in the mud
With your bare feet between the zinnias and the columbine
So they never reach morning,
And let me have your scent only.
When the hidden sun was just giving pink to the sky
You pressed me into a corner behind the door
And traced with your finger
The large violet birthmark on the left side of my face.

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Jonathan Sisson

Diana's Baths

New Hampshire: the sound
of fast water in cascades,
a miniscule toad
under a low moosewood leaf,
and running club moss,

down past a dismantled mill,
laminated wheel
split open like an old gourd
scattered in the grass,
red clover and bumblebees,

where white admirals
heliolatrously fan
their black wings and sip
in a hollow of worn rock
a fraternal dram.

Collecting the waterfalls
of the White Mountains
at the height of the summer

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when the waterfalls
no longer pulsate in spate,

my hounds and I hark,
as when in falling asleep
we hear someone's voice
if we have been from the womb
untimely induced

so that forever after
we wait in silence
when a conversation's done
as though that someone
might clear her throat and go on.

Two young women step
from pine needles to granite,
slipping from their kilts,
from shadows into sunlight,
to ride like otters

the long sweep of green water,
basins and sluices,
initiating themselves,
lightly holding hands
over the slipperiest chutes.

And then she sees me.
She tells the other something
that tingles my skull
and requires that one escape
to Cathedral Ledge.

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C. K. Williams

From My Window

Spring: the first morning when that one true block of sweet,
laminar, complex scent arrives
from somewhere west and I keep coming to lean on the sill,
glorying in the end of the wretched winter.
The scabby-barked sycamores ringing the empty lot across
the way are budded—I hadn't even noticed—
and the thick spikes of the unlikely urban crocuses have
already broken the gritty soil.
Up the street, some surveyors with tripods are waving each
other left and right the way they do.
A girl in a gymsuit jogged by a while ago, some kids passed,
playing hooky, I imagine, and now the paraplegic
Vietnam vet who lives in a half-converted warehouse
down the block
and the friend who stays with him and seems to help him
out come weaving towards me, their battered
wheelchair lurching uncertainly from one edge of the
sidewalk to the other.
I know where they're going—to the "Legion;" once, when I
was putting something out, they stopped,
both drunk that time, too, both reeking—it wasn't ten
o'clock—and we chatted for a bit.

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I don't know how they stay alive—on benefits most likely. I wonder if they're lovers.
They don't look it. Right now, in fact, they look a wreck, careening haphazardly along,
contriving as they reach beneath me to dip a wheel from the curb so that the chair skewers, teeters,
tips, and they both tumble, the one slowly, almost gracefully sliding in stages from his seat,
his expression hardly marking it, the other staggering over him, spinning heavily down, to lie on the asphalt, his mouth working, his feet shoving weakly and fruitlessly against the curb.
In the storefront office on the corner, Reed and Son, Real Estate, have come to see the show:
gazing through the golden letters of their name, they're not, at least, thank god, laughing.
Now the buddy, grabbing at a hydrant, gets himself erect and stands there for a moment, panting.
Now he has to lift the other one, who lies utterly still, a forearm shielding his eyes from the sun.
He hauls him partly upright, then hefts him almost all the way into the chair but a dangling foot
catches a support-plate, jerking everything around so that he has to put him down, set the chair to rights and hoist him again and as he does he jerks the grimy jeans right off him.
No drawers, shrunken, blotchy thighs; under the thick white coils of belly blubber the poor, blunt pud, tiny, terrified, retracted, is almost invisible in the sparse genital hair,
then his friend pulls his pants up, he slumps wholly back as though he were, at last, to be let be,

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and the friend leans against the cyclone fence, suddenly
staring up at me as though he'd known
all along that I was watching and I can't help wondering if
he knows that in the winter, too,
I watched, the night he went out to the lot and walked,
paced rather, almost ran, for how many hours.
It was snowing, the city in that holy silence, the last we have,
when the storm takes hold,
and he was making patterns that I thought at first were
circles then realized made a figure eight,
what must have been to him a perfect symmetry but which,
from where I was, shivered, bent,
and lay on its side: a warped, unclear infinity, slowly, as the
snow came faster, going out.
Over and over again, his head lowered to the task, he
slogged the path he'd blazed but the race was lost, his
prints were filling faster than he made them now and I
looked away,
up across the skeletal trees to the tall center-city buildings,
some, though it was midnight,
with all their offices still gleaming, their scarlet warning-
beacons signalling erratically
against the thickening flakes, their smouldering auras
softening portions of the dim, milky sky.
In the morning, nothing; every trace of him effaced, all the
field pure white, its surface glittering, the dawn,
glancing from its glaze, oblique, relentless, unadorned.

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Jean Valentine

Birthday Letter from South Carolina

for Sarah, 21

Yellow apple
star inside the apple
seed star quiet

*

Walking up the Cummings' quiet, red-earth road,
I think of you there, near the white-
ridged harbor: in a yellow kerchief,
in the blowing sunlight, you walk
along the concrete of the holding world.

You hold it all to your chest, the blue day, night,
long coffee, long talk, —You hold
your kind, stumbling, sure
life in your hands.
Indian cloth, the goose-neck desk light. . .

*

Basho spent the first twenty years of his life
apprenticing, his second twenty years
raising his family, the third twenty years
walking. Walking here

today I saw him, Basho, at the far edge of the field
of winter wheat; and you alongside him;
his long black and white steps moving
not away; alongside.

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. . it's important - the truth... '

Leona
—Man cannot live by Pepperonis alone, but —

(SHE has torn a couple of cellophane-wrapped sausages from over the bar and hands them to the YOUTH.)

You ~~j~~stify me, you care for each other, bring a new life in a world over-populated.

Out with me. Down the walk's a blue neon sigh- sign. - Room vacant. I donate the price of a clean bed for this girl for a night's rest and the ~~truth~~ underground is not going to go out on you.

(SHE shepherds them out: pauses a moment for a farewell salute to the sailfish.)

'Meglior solo', huh, ducks?

(Exits.)

FOLLOW THROUGH SCENE BETWEEN MONK 'ND VIOLET 'ND MONK'S SOLILOQUY 'T CURT'IN - with possible excision of line relating to the underground paper.)

A Tennessee Williams manuscript page from a draft of his play Small Craft Warnings *written on the back of a thin onion-skinned piece of hotel stationery.*

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Don Bachardy

The Art of Theater V
Tennessee Williams

The Paris Review *interview with Tennessee Williams took place over several weeks, first in Chicago, and then in New York.*

In Chicago, Williams was hard at work on the production of a new play being done at the Goodman Theater. It is a humorous and moving work called A House Not Meant To Stand, *the title referring to the state of American civilization at present.*

I interviewed Williams in his suite at the Radisson Hotel on North Michigan Avenue in Chicago. It was a huge, four bedroom penthouse decorated in a 1930s mock Moroccan style:

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fake stone walls, iron chandeliers, a massive fireplace, a staircase and balcony, all of it reminiscent of the interior design especially popular about the time, 1943, that Williams had been a contract writer at the film studios in Hollywood. For that reason he had dubbed the place "The Norma Desmond Suite" after the role played by Gloria Swanson in Sunset Boulevard.

It was Williams' seventieth birthday, and he followed the routine he has adhered to most of his adult life. He got up at dawn and went to his typewriter and worked. Then he swam in the hotel's pool. He returned to his suite and glanced through a pile of mail, mostly birthday greetings from friends. He opened several presents and a box containing a literary prize just presented to him by Italy for The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone. *He found this somewhat puzzling because, he explained, when the novel and movie first appeared the Italians were angered by his story of a Roman gigolo romancing an older woman.*

He finally sat down and talked with me for several hours. Williams was dressed in a loose embroidered shirt, beige slacks, and soft canvas shoes. He was tanned, having spent most of the winter at his home in Key West, Florida. He looked ten years younger than his age. He was in an unusually happy mood, in part because the play was going well, but also because he had around him a number of close friends, among them Jane Smith, the actress and widow of artist Tony Smith. Also in Chicago was Williams' brother Dakin, with his wife and two adopted daughters.

Three weeks later, after flying to Key West from Chicago, Williams came to New York. While he keeps an apartment in the city, he rarely uses it. Instead, as has been his habit for many years, he stayed at the Hotel Elysée on East 54th Street. He had come to New York to visit his sister Rose, who is a resident at a private sanitarium upstate, near West Point. He was also in New York to conduct some business. He consulted with his editors about three forthcoming books: a collection of short fiction tentatively entitled, It Happened The Day The Sun Rose*; a volume of five of his screenplays, among them* The Loss of a Teardrop Diamond, Boom!, One Arm, *and* All Gaul

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Is Divided; *and an autobiographical work,* My Life in the American Theater: An Interpretive World. *Additionally, Williams has three full length plays in various preproduction stages, and is contending with movie producers on a possible remake of the film version of* A Streetcar Named Desire.

The night before I interviewed him in New York, Williams, along with the painter Vassilis Voglis and myself, spent a night on the town. We had an early dinner at an Italian restaurant, and then went to see the Paul Taylor Dance Company perform at City Center. Later we ended at a bar called Rounds which boasts a somewhat piss-elegant decor and a clientele consisting largely of male hustlers and those who employ them.

Around noon the next day, I completed the interview with Tennessee Williams in his suite at the Elysée. He was tired from the night before, and perhaps because of that he was more subdued than he had been in Chicago, and the interview was more reflective. Williams very much dislikes talking about his work and the process through which he creates his art. But in New York, on that dreary, gray day, he was open to it and told me what he could about how he writes.

THE GENESIS OF WRITING

I was a born writer, I think. Yes, I think that I was. At least when I had this curious disease affecting my heart at the age of eight. I was more or less bedridden for half a year. My mother exaggerated the cause. She said I swallowed my tonsils! Years later, when I had the *Time* cover story, and she was quoted, doctors looked it up and said, "A medical impossibility!"

But I do think there was a night when I nearly died, or possibly *did* die. I had a strange, mystical feeling as if I were seeing a golden light. Elizabeth Taylor had the same experience. But I survived that night. That was a turning point, and I gradually pulled out of it. But I was never the same physically. It changed my entire personality. I'd been an aggressive tomboy until that illness. I used to beat up all the kids on the block. I used to confiscate their marbles, snatch them up!

Then that illness came upon me, and my personality

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changed. I became a shut-in. I think my mother encouraged me to be more of a shut-in than I needed to be. Anyway, I took to playing solitary games, amusing myself. I don't mean masturbation. I mean I began to live an intensely imaginative life. And it persisted that way. That's how I turned into a writer, I guess. By the age of twelve, I started writing.

MOTHER AND MISS ROSE

My mother—everyone calls her Miss Edwina—was essentially more psychotic than my sister Rose. Mother was put away once, you know. She was put away long before she was old, in the early part of the decade of the Fifties. I was on St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands, and she called me up.

"Tom, guess where I am?" she said.

"Why, Mother, aren't you at home?"

"No, Tom, they put me away!"

She was living alone, and I guess her fantasies got the best of her. She thought the blacks were planning an uprising in St. Louis, and they were exchanging signals by rattling the garbage pails. She called the family doctor over to tell him about these threatening aspects of life, and he took her right to the bug-house! So I left St. Thomas and sprung her.

Later, when I was in St. Louis, the phone rang and she picked it up. There was no one at the other end. After a while, she said, "*I* know who you are! I'm here waiting! *Unafraid!*"

Mother chose to have Rose's lobotomy done. My father didn't want it. In fact, he cried. It's the only time I saw him cry. He was in a state of sorrow when he learned that the operation had been performed.

I was at the University of Iowa, and they just wrote me what happened. I didn't know anything about the operation. I'd never heard of a lobotomy. Mother was saying that it was bound to be a great success. Now, of course, it's been exposed as a very bad procedure that isn't practiced anymore. But it didn't embitter me against my mother. It saddened me a great deal because my sister and I cared for each other. I cared for her more than I did my mother. But it didn't embitter me against Miss Edwina. No, I just thought she was an almost criminally

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foolish woman.

Why was the operation performed? Well, Miss Rose expressed herself with great eloquence, but she said things that shocked Mother. I remember when I went to visit her at Farmington, where the state sanitarium was. Rose loved to shock Mother. She had great inner resentment towards her, because Mother had imposed this monolithic puritanism on her during adolescence. Rose said, "Mother, you know we girls at All Saints College, we used to abuse ourselves with altar candles we stole from the chapel." And Mother screamed like a peacock! She rushed to the head doctor, and she said, "Do anything, *anything* to shut her up!" Just like Mrs. Venable, you know, except that Mother wasn't as cruel as Mrs. Venable, poor bitch. Whatever Mother did, she didn't know what she was doing.

She was terrified of sex. She used to scream every time she had sex with my father. And we children were terrified. We'd run out in the streets and the neighbors would take us in.

A year or so before Mother died, she believed she had a horse living with her in her room. She didn't like its presence at all, and she complained bitterly about this imaginary horse that moved into the place with her. She'd always wanted a horse as a child. And now that she finally had one, she didn't like it one bit.

At the end, she changed her name. Miss Edwina dropped the "a" from her name and became Edwin Williams. That's how she signed herself. It's strange to have a mother who at ninety-four decides to call herself Edwin.

Miss Rose smokes too much. She enters a restaurant and asks, "How many packs of Chesterfields do you have? *I'll take them all!*" Or she'll ask in a store, "How many bars of Ivory soap do you have? That all you got? Well, I need at least twenty!"

One night Rose went with me to Mrs. Murray Crane's as a dinner guest. She had a huge reticule with her. Do you know what that is? It's a huge embroidered bag. Rose was very sly, as schizophrenics often are. All during dinner, after each course, or even while people were eating, she would turn to Mrs. Crane, this stately dowager to her right, and say, "Have a

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cigarette, dear?" And Mrs. Crane would reply, "Oh, I don't smoke, Miss Williams. I do not smoke! And I fear that you're smoking too *much*, Miss Williams!"

Well, Miss Rose took umbrage at that. So after dinner she excused herself. There were four or five lavatories in this duplex apartment, and Rose was gone for a *remarkably* long time. When she came back her reticule was absolutely packed like Santa Claus' bag. She'd cleared the house completely out of soap and toilet paper! It was the biggest haul since the James Brothers. Needless to say, we didn't get a return engagement there.

She's very nervous, you know. When she was in Key West while you were there, she was trying not to smoke so she tried to keep herself busy. She took it upon herself to water all the trees and plants, and there are a great many. Rose would take a glass of water from the house, water a plant with it, return and fill the glass, and go out again,all day long. I find that touching, how she tries to occupy her time.

She has curious misapprehensions about things. Richard Zoerink was so kind to her. They would go walking in Key West along the water. He'd buy her an ice cream cone, something she loves. One day, I asked Rose where she'd been that afternoon, and she said that she and Richard had taken a walk along the Mediterranean Sea, and she had enjoyed the view of Italy. Lovely Miss Rose. She thinks she's Queen of England, you know. She once signed a photograph of herself to me, "Rose of England."

I love her, you know. For a person like Rose who spent many years in a state asylum, as she had to do before I got any money, living is constantly a defensive existence. The stubbornness, the saying "No!" flatly to things is almost an instinctive response. If I say to Rose, "Don't you think it's time for you to get some rest?" Her instinct is just to say "No!"

Once in Key West some people dropped by, and they began telling some very bawdy jokes. Rose didn't approve. So she got up and stood in a corner with her hands clasped in prayer. My cousin Stell, who was taking care of her, said, "Rose, why are you standing like that?"

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Rose replied, "I'm praying for their redemption!"

SUCCESS

It all began for me in Chicago in 1944. I've had some of the happiest times of my life here. We were in Chicago for three and a half months with *The Glass Menagerie*. We opened in late December, and played until mid-March. And I had a lovely time. I knew a lot of university students, you know?

So I associate the success of *Menagerie* with the Chicago critics Claudia Cassidy and Ashton Stevens. They really put it over. The opening night audience had never seen this kind of theater before, and their response was puzzlement. And I suppose the play would have died here if Claudia Cassidy and Ashton Stevens hadn't kept pushing and pushing and pushing. They compared Laurette Taylor to Duse, which was a good comparison, I think. Miss Cassidy is very elderly now, but her mind's as sharp as a whistle!

Menagerie got to New York in 1945. It was sold out three and a half months before it opened. People would stop off in New York to see it because they knew it was a new kind of theater, and they knew about Laurette's incredible performance, though the rest of the cast was pretty run-of-the-mill.

The sudden success? Oh, it was terrible! I just didn't like it. If you study photographs taken of me the morning after the huge reception it got in New York, you'll see I was very depressed.

I'd had one eye operation, and I went into the hospital for another one I needed. Lying in the hospital, unable to move for several days, people came over and read to me, and I recovered some sense of reality.

Then, after *Menagerie*, I went to Mexico and had a marvelously happy time. I went alone. Leonard Bernstein was there. He introduced me to Winchell Mount, who gave weekly Saturday night dances. All male. And I learned how to follow! I was the belle of the ball because I could always dance well, but I gave up that career for writing.

Before the success of *Menagerie* I'd reached the very, very bottom. I would have died without the money. I couldn't have

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gone on any further, baby, without money when suddenly, *providentially*, *The Glass Menagerie* made it when I was thirty-four. I couldn't have gone on with these hand-to-mouth jobs, these jobs for which I had no aptitude, like waiting on tables, running elevators, and even being a teletype operator. None of this stuff was anything I could have held for long. I started writing at twelve, as I said. By the time I was in my late teens I was writing every day, I guess, even after I was in the shoe business for three years. I wrecked my health, what there was of it. I drank black coffee so much, so I could stay up nearly all night and write, that it exhausted me physically and nervously. So if I suddenly hadn't had this dispensation from Providence with *Menagerie*, I couldn't have made it for another year, I don't think.

WHERE PLAYS COME FROM

The process by which the idea for a play comes to me has always been something I really couldn't pinpoint. A play just seems to materialize, like an apparition it gets clearer and clearer and clearer. It's very vague at first, as in the case of *Streetcar*, which came after *Menagerie*. I simply had the vision of a woman in her late youth. She was sitting in a chair all alone by a window with the moonlight streaming in on her desolate face, and she'd been stood up by the man she planned to marry.

I believe I was thinking of my sister because she was madly in love with some young man at the International Shoe Company who paid her court. He was extremely handsome, and she was profoundly in love with him. Whenever the phone would ring, she'd nearly faint. She'd think it was he calling for a date, you know? They saw each other every other night, and then one time he just didn't call anymore. That was when Rose first began to go into a mental decline. From that vision *Streetcar* evolved. I called it at the time, *Blanche's Chair in the Moon*, which is a very bad title. But it was from that image, you know, of a woman sitting by a window that *Streetcar* came to me.

Of course, the young man who courted my sister was nothing like Stanley. He was a young executive from an Ivy League

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school. He had every apparent advantage. It was during the Depression years, however, and he was extremely ambitious. My father had an executive position at the time with the shoe company, and the young man had thought perhaps a marriage to Rose would be to his advantage. Then, unfortunately, my father was involved in a terrible scandal and nearly lost his job. At any rate, he was no longer a candidate for the Board of Directors. He had his ear bit off in a poker fight! It had to be restored. They had to take cartilage from his ribs, and skin off his ass, and they reproduced something that looked like a small cauliflower attached to the side of his head! So any time anybody would get into the elevator with my father, he'd scowl, and people would start giggling. That was when the young man stopped calling on Rose. He knew the giggling had gone too far and gotten into the newspapers.

The idea for *The Glass Menagerie* came very slowly, much more slowly than *Streetcar* for example. I think I worked on *Menagerie* longer than any other play. I didn't think it'd ever be produced. I wasn't writing it for that purpose. I wrote it first as a short story called "Portrait of a Girl in Glass," which is, I believe, one of my best stories. I guess *Menagerie* grew out of the intense emotions I felt seeing my sister's mind begin to go.

INFLUENCES

What writers influenced me as a young man? *Chekhov!*

As a dramatist? Chekhov!

As a story writer? Chekhov!

D.H. Lawrence, too, for his spirit, of course, for his understanding of sexuality, of life in general.

EFFECTS

When I write I don't aim to shock people, and I'm surprised when I do. But I don't think that anything that occurs in life should be omitted from art, though the artist should present it in a fashion that is artistic and not ugly.

I set out to tell the truth. And sometimes the *truth* is shocking.

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LOOKING BACK

I now look back at periods of my life, and I think, Was that really *me*? Was I doing those things? I don't feel any continuity in my life. It is as if my life were segments that are separate and do not connect. From one period to another it has all happened behind the curtain of work. And I just peek out from behind the curtain now and then and find myself on totally different terrain.

The first period was from the age of eleven until I left the university and went into the shoe business. I was madly in love with a girl named Hazel who was frigid. And that period in my life was marked by extreme shyness. I couldn't look at people in the face without blushing. In high school, I couldn't verbally answer questions. I could only give written answers. I couldn't produce my voice. It sounded like grunting, you know? *That* shy. I supposed it was caused by an unconscious clash in me between my sexual drives and the puritanism imposed by my mother, and the great fear my father inspired in me. He was a terrifying man. He was so unhappy that he couldn't help but be tyrannical at home. That was one period.

The next period was happy. It was after I came out in the gay world. I didn't think of it as coming out. I thought of it as a new world, a world in which I seemed to fit for the first time, and where life was full of adventure that satisfied the libido. I felt comfortable at last. And that was a happy time, but *The Glass Menagerie* ended that period and new problems developed with success.

From then through the Sixties, because even during the Sixties I was working more or less steadily, that was another period different from the rest. But at the end of the Sixties I ended up in the bug-house because I violated Dr. Max Jacobson's instructions not to drink when I took the speed injections. Toward the end, this combination produced paranoia and affected my memory and my health. When I went to New York, I couldn't remember having met my producers before, although they'd had daily meetings with me in Key West. Finally, after Ann Meechem and I fled to Tokyo after the terrible reception of

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In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel, I became more and more ill. I had to be assisted up stairs. When I returned home alone to Key West I was *very* ill. They were building a new kitchen on my house, and the stove was in the patio. It was still operating there while the builders worked. I was stumbling around with a Silex pan, totally disoriented, trying to get it on the stove. And I just sat down on the stove! It was an electric stove, and I inflicted third degree burns on my body! I think Marion Vicarro called my brother, and Dakin came down to Key West. He called Audrey Wood, and she said, "Well, put him in a hospital." But she didn't bother to say which one.

Dakin, thinking I was going to die anyway, I was in such terrible condition, had me immediately converted to Roman Catholicism so I'd be saved from hell, and then he just threw me into Barnes Hospital (St. Louis), right into the psychiatric ward, which was *incredibly* awful. They suddenly snatched away every pill I had! The injections went too. So I blacked out. It was cold turkey, baby. They tell me I had three brain concussions in the course of one long day, and a coronary. How I survived, I don't know. I think there were homicidal intentions at work there. I was in that place for three and a half months. The first month I was in the violent ward, although I was not violent. I was terrifed and I crouched in a corner trying to read. The patients would have terrible fights over the one television set. Someone would put on the news, and another patient would jump up, yelling, and turn on cartoons. No wonder they were violent.

CHRISTIANITY

I was born a Catholic, really. I'm a Catholic by nature. My grandfather was an English Catholic (Anglican), very, very high church. He was higher church than the Pope. However, my "conversion" to the Catholic church was rather a joke because it occurred while I was taking Dr. Jacobson's miracle shots. I couldn't learn anything about the tenets of the Roman Catholic church, which are ridiculous anyway. I just loved the

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beauty of the ritual in the Mass. But Dakin found a Jesuit father who was very lovely and all, and he said, "Mr. Williams is not in a condition to learn anything. I'll give him extreme unction and just pronounce him a Catholic."

I was held up in the Roman Catholic church, with people supporting me on both sides, and I was declared a Catholic. What do you think of that? Does that make me a Catholic? No, I was whatever I was before.

And yet my work is full of Christian symbols. Deeply, deeply Christian. But it's the image of Christ, His beauty and purity, and His teachings, yes. . . but I've never subscribed to the idea that life as we know it, what we're living now, is resumed after our death. No. I think we're absorbed back into, what do they call it? The eternal flux? The eternal shit, that's what I was thinking.

POETRY

I'm a poet. And then I put the poetry in the drama. I put it in short stories, and I put it in the plays. Poetry's poetry. It doesn't have to be called a poem, you know.

YOUNG WRITERS

If they're meant to be writers, they will write. There's nothing that can stop them. It may kill them. They may not be able to stand the terrible indignities, humiliations, privations, shocks that attend the life of an American writer. They may not. Yet they may have some sense of humor about it, and manage to survive.

WRITING

When I write, everything is visual, as brilliantly as if it were on a lit stage. And I talk out the lines as I write.

When I was in Rome, my landlady thought I was demented. She told Frank (Merlo), "Oh, Mr. Williams has lost his mind! He stalks about the room talking out loud!"

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Frank said, "Oh, he's just writing." She didn't understand *that*.

REWRITING

In writing a play, I can get started on the wrong tangent, go off somewhere and then have to make great deletions and begin over, not *all* the way over, but just back to where I went off on that particular tangent. This is particularly true of the surrealist play that I'm currently writing. I'm dedicating it to the memory of Joe Orton. *The Everlasting Ticket* it's called. It's about the poet laureate of Three Mile Island. I'm in the third revision of *Ticket* at the moment.

I do an enormous amount of rewriting. And when I finally let a play go, when I know it's complete and as it should be, is when I see a production of it that satisfies me. Of course, even when *I'm* satisfied with a production, the critics are not, usually. In New York especially. The critics feel I'm basically anarchistic, and dangerous as a writer.

AUDIENCE

I don't have an audience in mind when I write. I'm writing mainly for myself. After a long devotion to playwriting I have a good inner ear. I know pretty well how a thing is going to sound on the stage, and how it will play. I write to satisfy this inner ear and its perceptions. That's the audience I write for.

DIRECTORS

Sometimes I write for someone specifically in mind. You know, I always used to write for (Elia) Kazan, although he no longer works as a director. What made him a great director was that he had an infinite understanding of people on an incredible level.

At one point Kazan and José Quintero were rather equal in talent. That was when Quintero began at the Circle in the Square downtown and did things like *Summer and Smoke* and

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A Long Day's Journey Into Night. Those early things. Then he took heavily to drink.

He was living at a very fashionable address, the penthouse apartment at 1 Fifth Avenue. I remember walking with Quintero out on the terrace. I said to him, "Why are you killing yourself like this with liquor? Because you are, you know. You're drinking much too heavily." He always liked me very much. He was an extremely kind and sweet person. He said, "I know. I know. It's just that all of a sudden I got all this attention, and it made me self-conscious. It scared me. I didn't know how my work was *done*. I simply worked through intuition. Then suddenly it seemed to me as if secrets of mine were being exposed." And so he drank excessively, and now he can't drink at all.

During *The Seven Descents of Myrtle*, as they called it, although it was actually *The Kingdom of Earth*, Quintero was drinking so heavily that Estelle Parsons said she couldn't take direction from him. David Merrick was producing, and he came to town. He said, "I have to fire this man. He's destroying the play." And I said, "Mr. Merrick, if you fire poor José I'm going to withdraw the play." So he let it come in.

You know, in those days David Merrick was a lovely man. He's been around the bend some since, but he was so nice in those days. We both went to Washington University. We were in the same drama class, I believe. In the Sixties he used to come to my apartment at the Mayfair when I wouldn't go out ever. He came over there to tell me he wanted to do *Kingdom of Earth*. And I just slurred something in reply. That's how I talked in those days. He said, "It's a very funny play!" And I went *grrrowwww*. . . I didn't give a shit whether he put it on or not, or whether I lived through the night.

TITLES

Sometimes I'll come up with a title that doesn't sound good in itself, but it's the only title that really fits the meaning of the play. Like *A House Not Meant To Stand* isn't a beautiful title.

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But the house it refers to in the play is in a terrible state of disrepair, virtually leaking rain water everywhere. That house, and therefore the title, is a metaphor for society in our times. And, of course, the critics don't like that sort of thing, nor do they dare to openly approve of it. They know who butters their bread.

Some titles come from dialogue as I write a play, or from the setting itself. Some come from poetry I've read. When I need a title I'll usually reread the poetry of Hart Crane. I take a copy of Crane's work with me when I travel. A phrase will catch my eye and seem right for what I'm writing. But there's no system to it. Sometimes a line from the play will serve as its title. I often change titles a number of times until I find one that seems right.

There is a Catholic church in Key West named "Mary, Star of the Sea." That would make a lovely title for a play.

LINE CHANGES

Performers can be enormously valuable in suggesting line changes in a play, I mean if they're intelligent performers. For instance, Geraldine Page. She's very intelligent, and she's a genius at acting. Being a genius at acting, and being intelligent aren't always the same thing. She'd suggest line changes. She'd say, "I find this line difficult to read." I think most of her suggestions were good, although she's not a writer. So I'd make the changes to satisfy her. I often do that with actors, if they're intelligent and care about the play.

MARLON BRANDO

Brando came up to the Cape when I was there. There was no point in discovering him, it was so obvious. I never saw such raw talent in an individual, except for Laurette Taylor, whose talent was hardly raw. Then, before he was famous, Brando was a gentle, lovely guy, a man of extraordinary beauty when I first met him. He was very natural and helpful. He repaired the plumbing that had gone on the whack, and he repaired the

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lights that had gone off. And then he just sat calmly down and began to read. After five minutes, Margo Jones, who was staying with us, said, "Oh, this is the greatest reading I've ever heard, even in *Texas*!" And that's how he was cast in *Streetcar*.

WARREN BEATTY

I didn't know of Warren's work, and I thought the role in *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* should be played by a Latin-type since the role's a Roman gigolo. I happened to be in Puerto Rico with Marion Vicarro, you know, the banana queen? She and I were gambling. She was playing blackjack, and I was playing roulette. All of a sudden a waiter came up to me with a little glass of milk, on a silver platter, and said, "A gentleman has sent this to you." I said, "I don't appreciate this kind of sarcasm!" So I went on playing roulette.

After I'd lost the amount of money I allow myself to lose, I started to leave. And there standing grinning at the door was Warren Beatty.

"Tennessee, I've come to read for you," he said. He was very young then, a really handsome boy.

I said, "But why, Warren? You're not the type to play a Roman gigolo."

And he said, "I'm going to read with an accent, and without it. I've come all the way from Hollywood to read for you."

"Well, that's lovely of you." And Marion and I went to his room, and he read fabulously. With an accent, and without.

Warren has no embarrassment about anything. Whenever he sees me he always embraces me. What an affectionate, warm, lovely man. I've found actors to be lovely people, although there are a few of them who have been otherwise.

AUDREY WOOD

Ever since my split with Audrey Wood [his longtime agent] there's been a holding pattern. I think she's the dominant figure in this. I think she has stock in the concern, ICM, and she won't allow anything to happen until I'm dead, baby.

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Why did I break with her? I didn't. Just the usual thing happened. An opening night. My nerves always go like spitfire then. We had a very good first preview (of *A Two Character Play*). The second preview we had a bunch of old, sour dames. They didn't get anything, and they hated it. It enraged me. I always lose my mind slightly when I get angry. Audrey was used to this. It happened time and time again. It shouldn't have surprised her at all. And I just turned to her after the performance and said, "You must have been pleased by this audience," because she hadn't been pleased by the enthusiastic, younger audience the night before. She got angry, and left town immediately with the greatest amount of publicity. And I realized that she had neglected me so totally during my seven years of terrible depression that any kind of professional relationship with her was no longer tenable.

I don't hold grudges. So when I encountered her some time later in the Algonquin Hotel, I stretched out my hand to touch hers. There was no way of avoiding her. She hissed like a snake! and drew back her hands as if I were a leper. Well, since then I know this woman hates me! She'd lost interest in me. I don't think you should lose interest in a person who is in deep depression. That's when your interest and concern should be most, if you're a true friend.

And I think I had a great deal to do with making her career. She'd only sold *Room Service* to the Marx Brothers before I came along and got her Bill Inge and Carson McCullers and...this sounds bitter, and I hold no animosity toward people. I hope I don't.

BEST FRIENDS

Carson McCullers and Jane Bowles were my best friends as writers. I think if poor Carson had not suffered this very early stroke when she'd barely turned thirty, she would have been the greatest American writer. She had recurrent illnesses, of course, each diminishing her power. It was a tragic thing to watch. It went on for ten years. I met her in Nantucket. I'd

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written her a fan letter about *Member of the Wedding*, I thought it was so lovely. I knew cousins of hers. And at my invitation, she came to the island to be my guest. Such an enchanting person! This was the last year before she had a stroke, the year Carson lived at 31 Pine Street in Nantucket with Pancho and me.

My other great writer friend, Jane Bowles, I first met in Acapulco in the summer of 1940, after I'd broken up with Kip. I took a trip to Mexico on one of these share-the-expense plan tours. I went down with a Mexican boy who'd married an American hooker, you know? He met her at the World's Fair. The poor girl was terrified. She was a sweet girl, but she was a hooker and he didn't know it. And she'd come to my room at night and tell me they were having terrible problems sexually. I think he was gay, you know, because all the *other* men in the car were. That's a pretty good indication! She said she wasn't getting any sex, and she thought I'd provide her with some.

I said, "I'm afraid, honey, it's not quite what I do anymore because, frankly, I'm homosexual."

"Oh, that's all right," she said, "I know female hygiene is a lot more complicated!" God, I thought that was a funny answer!

Apparently, their marriage worked out somehow. I left some of my gear in the trunk of the car, and several years later after I'd become known, after *The Glass Menagerie*, she shipped it all back to me with a very lovely note.

It was that summer in Mexico when I met Jane Bowles. I knew she was there with Paul. Poor Paul was always sick. He couldn't eat anything in Mexico. But there's very little in Mexico you *can* eat, at least not in those days. They were such a charmingly odd couple, I loved them both. Jane produced such a small body of work, but it was tremendous work. And Paul's work? I guess it's about as good as anything is now.

FRANK MERLO

I met Frankie by accident at the Atlantic House in Provincetown one summer, the summer of 1947 when I was finishing

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Streetcar. I was in the Atlantic House, and Pancho was there, Margo Jones, and Joanna Albers. We were all living in a cottage. Stella Brooks was singing at the Atlantic House, and I'd gone out on the porch at the Atlantic House to breathe the fresh air and the lovely sea mist coming in. And Frankie came out behind me, and leaned against the balcony, and I observed that beautifully sculptured body in Levis, you know? I was rather bold, as I am at certain moments. And I just said, "Would you like to take a drive?" He grinned, and said yes. He'd come there with John Latouche, you know, the songwriter.

So we drove out to the beach and made love. It was ecstatic, even though it was in the sand.

I didn't see him again until accidentally I ran into him in a delicatessen on Third Avenue. I was living in an apartment designed by Tony Smith on East 58th Street. Frankie was with a young war buddy of his. And I said, "Why Frank!" And he said, "Hi, Tenn." I said, "Why haven't you called me?" And he replied, "I read about your great success, and I didn't want to seem like I was trying to hop on the bandwagon."

He and his buddy came home with me to this lovely apartment. And Frankie just stayed on. He was so close to life! I was never that close, you know. He gave me the connection to day-to-day and night-to-night living. To reality. He tied me down to earth. And I had that for fourteen years, until he died. And that was the happy period of my adult life.

TRAVEL

I'm restless. I like traveling. When Frank Merlo was living, he being Sicilian, we spent four or five, sometimes six months out of the year in Rome.

I was once asked why I travel so much, and I said, "Because it's harder to hit a moving target!"

THE COMPETITION

I don't compete with Eugene O'Neill or anyone else. My

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work is totally in its own category. It's more esoteric than anyone else's, except Joe Orton's. And I don't compete with Joe Orton. I love him too much.*

EUGENE O'NEILL

Now O'Neill is not as good a playwright as, for instance, Albee. I don't think he's even as good as Lanford Wilson. I could give you quite a list.

I liked O'Neill's writing. He had a great spirit, and a great sense of drama, yes. But most of all it was his spirit, his *passion*, that moved me. And when *The Iceman Cometh* opened to very bad notices, very mixed notices at best in New York, I wrote him a letter. I said, in reading your play, at first I found it too long, then I gradually realized that its length, and the ponderosity of it, are what gave it a lot of its power. I was deeply moved by it, finally.

He wrote me a very nice reply and said he was always deeply depressed after an opening and that he appreciated my letter particularly. But that letter has disappeared like most of my letters.

LIQUOR

O'Neill had a terrible problem with alcohol. Most writers do. American writers nearly all have problems with alcohol because there's a great deal of tension involved in writing, you know that. And it's all right up to a certain age, and then you begin to need a little nervous support that you get from drinking. Now my drinking has to be moderate. Just look at the liver spots I've got on me!

OPENING NIGHTS

On opening nights in the old days, when I really could drink—I can't drink heavily now because of this pancreatitis I developed from over-drinking—but when I *could* drink, on

*Among his plays are *What the Butler Saw*; *Entertaining Mr. Sloane*; *Loot*; and *Funeral Games*. In 1967, Joe Orton was murdered in his sleep by his longtime lover Kenneth Halliwell. Later that night Halliwell committed suicide. Joe Orton was thirty-five at the time of his death.

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opening nights I'd either have a flask on me and keep myself drunk and stand at attention in the theater, or else I'd dart out to the nearest bar and sit there until nearly before the curtain came down and then I'd head back into the theater.

Now I take openings much more calmly. If they're giving a good performance, and they usually do on opening night, I just sit and enjoy it. After the curtain, I take a red-eye flight out of town. I have a car waiting for me with the luggage in it, and scoot out to LaGuardia or Kennedy and take the red-eye to Key West.

KEY WEST

It's delightful. When I first went there in 1941 it was still more delightful than it is now. I have one-quarter of a city block there now, you know. A swimming pool. My studio with a skylight. I have a little guest house in the form of a ship's cabin, with a double-decker bunk in it. And I have my gazebo, the Jane Bowles Summer House. Everything I need for a life. It's a charming, comfortable place.

HABITS OF WORK

In Key West I get up just before daybreak, as a rule. I like being completely alone in the house in the kitchen when I have my coffee and ruminate on what I'm going to work on. I usually have two or three pieces of work going at the same time, and then I decide which to work on that day.

I go to my studio. I usually have some wine there. And then I carefully go over what I wrote the day before. You see, baby, after a glass or two of wine I'm inclined to extravagance. I'm inclined to excesses because I drink while I'm writing, so I'll blue pencil a lot the next day. Then I sit down, and I begin to write.

My work is *emotionally* autobiographical. It has no relationship to the actual events of my life, but it reflects the emotional currents of my life. I try to work every day because you have no refuge but writing. When you're going through a period of unhappiness, a broken love affair, the death of someone you love, or some other disorder in your life, then you have no refuge but writing. However, when depression comes on of a near clinical

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nature, then you're paralyzed even at work. Immediately after the death of Frank Merlo, I was paralyzed, unable to write, and it wasn't until I began taking the speed shots that I came out of it. Then I was able to work like a demon. Could you live without writing, baby? I couldn't.

Because it's so important, if my work is interrupted I'm like a raging tiger. It angers me so. You see, I have to reach a high emotional pitch in order to work if the scene is dramatic.

I've heard that Norman Mailer has said that a playwright only writes in short bursts of inspiration while a novelist has to write six or seven hours a day. Bull! Now Mr. Mailer is more involved in the novel form, and I'm more involved in the play form. In the play form I work steadily and hard. If a play grips me I'll continue to work on it until I reach a point where I can no longer decide what to do with it. Then I'll discontinue work on it.

DRUGS

There was a very lovely young guy at New Directions named Robert MacGregor, who's dead now. He'd been a patient of Dr. Max Jacobson. He only took little pills that Jacobson gave him. I was in a state of such profound depression that he thought anything was worth trying, so he took me to Jacobson. It was through this Robert MacGregor that I had those three years of Jacobson shots that he mailed to me in the various parts of the country.

I did find Max Jacobson's shots marvelously stimulating to me as a writer. And during those last three years of the Sixties, before my collapse, I did some of my best writing. People don't know it yet, but I did.

My collapse was related to the fact that I continued to drink while taking the shots. I was not supposed to. I had a bad heart. Dr. Max Jacobson never listened to my heart. Never took my pulse. Never took my blood pressure. He would just look at me. He was really sort of an alchemist. He would look at me for a long time. He had all these little vials in front of him. He'd

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take a drop from one, and a drop from another, and then look at me again, and take another drop or two. . . . Of course, the primary element was speed. And after I had a shot, I'd get into a taxi and my heart would begin to pound, and I'd immediately have to have a drink or I wouldn't be able to get home. I'd have died in the cab otherwise.

ON BEING SINGLE

I think it made it possible for me to practice my profession as a writer. You know what happened to poor Norman Mailer. One wife after another, and all that alimony. I've been spared all that. I give people money, yes. But I couldn't have afforded alimony, not to all those wives. I would've had to behead them! Being single made it possible for me to work.

HOMOSEXUALITY

I never found it necessary to deal with it in my work. It was never a preoccupation of mine, except in my intimate, private life. In my work, I've had a great affinity with the female psyche. Her personality, her emotions, what she suffers and feels. People who say I create transvestite women are full of shit. Frankly. Just vicious shit. Personally, I like women more than men. They respond to me more than men do, and they always have. The people who have loved me, the ratio of women to men is about five to one, I would say.

I know there's a right wing backlash against homosexuals. But at the age of seventy I no longer consider it a matter of primary concern. Not that I want anything bad to happen to other homosexuals. God knows, enough has.

I always thought homosexual writers were in the minority of writers. Nobody's yet made a correct census of the actual number of homosexuals in the population of America. And they never will be able to because there are still too many closets, some of them rather securely locked. And it's also still dangerous to be openly homosexual.

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CRUISING

I enjoyed cruising, more for Donald Windham's company, than for the pick-ups that were made. After all, pick-ups are just pick-ups. But Windham was a delightful friend to be with. I always realized that he had a streak of bitchery in him. And that's why my letters to him had a great deal of malicious humor in them. I knew he liked that. And since I was writing to a person who enjoyed that sort of thing I tried to amuse him with those things. Of course, I didn't know he was *collecting* my letters! And I didn't know I was signing away the copyright. I'm happy the letters were published because they're beautiful, I think. I'm very unhappy that he may have shut down *London Magazine* with that lawsuit.*

There used to be a place in Times Square called the Crossroads Tavern, right near a place called Diamond Jim Brady's. The place was closing down, and on this occasion these big, drunk sailors came and picked us up. We didn't pick *them* up. I wasn't attracted to them. I didn't want to, and I felt really uneasy about the situation. But Windham was always attracted to rough sailor types.

As it happened Windham was staying at the Claridge Hotel, which doesn't exist now in the Times Square area. He had been living with a painter, Paul Cadmus. He was occupying a room with Paul Cadmus, and it was through Paul Cadmus that he met Sandy Campbell.** It had been inconvenient for Cadmus to have Donald Windham at his place one night, and so he'd gotten him a room at the Claridge. And Donald had taken the two sailors and me into Claridge's.

I got more and more suspicious because in the lobby the sailors said, "We'll go up the elevator, and you wait ten minutes, and we'll meet you in the corridor. . . ." Or

*When Donald Windham published *Tennessee Williams' Letters to Donald Windham: 1940–1965* (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, New York, 1977), Dotson Rader wrote an essay for *London Magazine* reviewing the letters. The piece was critical of Windham. Mr. Windham responded with a lawsuit, later settled out of court.

**Sandy Campbell is Windham's friend and companion.

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something like that. It seemed suspicious, but I was a little high, and so was Donald.

We got up to the room, and it was really a bestial occurrence. I hated every minute of it. Finally, after they ripped the phones out of the wall, they stood me against a wall with a switchblade knife while they beat Windham, knocking a tooth out, blackening both his eyes, beating him almost to death. I kept saying, "Oh, don't do that, don't hit him anymore! He's *tubercular*!"

Then they said, "Now it's your turn!" So they stood poor, bloody Windham against the wall while they beat me nearly to death. I had a concussion from the beating. Next thing I knew I was at the emergency Red Cross station at the YMCA where I lived.

KIP

Kip was very honest, and I loved him and I think he loved me. He was a draft-dodger from Canada. He had a passion to be a dancer, and he knew he couldn't if he went into the war. It'd be too late, he felt, when it was over, for him to study dancing. You see, he was a boy of twenty-one or twenty-two when the war happened.

I've written a play called *Something Cloudy, Something Clear* about Kip. The setting is very important in this play. It involves a bleached, unfurnished beach shack in which the writer, who represents me, but is called August, is working on a portable typewriter supported by an old crate. He sleeps on a mattress on the floor. Alongside that set is the floor of another beach house shack that's been blown away in a hurricane. This floor, however, forms a platform on which Kip used to dance, practicing dancing to my Victrola. The subtitle of the play is *The Silver Victrola*.

I prefer the title *Something Cloudy, Something Clear* because it refers to my eyes. My left eye was cloudy then because it was developing a cataract. But my right eye was clear. It was like the two sides of my nature. The side that was obsessively homosexual, compulsively interested in sexuality. And the side that in those days was gentle and understanding and contemplative. So it's a pertinent title.

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Now this play is written from the vantage point of 1979, about a boy I loved and who is now dead. The author (August) knows it's 1979. He knows Kip is dead, and that the girl whom Kip dances with is dead. I've invented the girl. Occasionally during the play the author onstage will make references that puzzle the boy, Kip, and the girl. But the author is the only one who realizes that it's really forty years later, and the boy and girl are dead, and he survives, still he survives. It happened in the summer of 1940, and it's a very lyrical play, probably the most lyrical play I've done in a very long while.

Kip died at the age of twenty-six. It was just after I completed my professionally abortive connection with MGM. The phone rang one day and an hysterical lady said, "Kip has ten days to live." A year before I had been told that Kip had been successfully operated on for a benign brain tumor.

He was at the Polyclinic Hospital near Times Square. You know how love bursts back into your heart when you hear of the loved one's dying.

As I entered Kip's room he was being spoon-fed by a nurse: a dessert of sugary apricots. He had never looked more beautiful. Kip's mind seemed as clear as his Slavic blue eyes.

We spoke a while. Then I rose and reached for his hand and he couldn't find mine, I had to find his.

After Kip died his brother sent me, from Canada, snapshots of Kip posing for a sculptor and they remained in my wallet some twenty years. They disappeared mysteriously in the Sixties. Well, Kip lives on in my leftover heart.

HEMINGWAY AND FITZGERALD

Hemingway had a remarkable interest in and understanding of homosexuality, for a man who wasn't a homosexual. I think both Hemingway and Fitzgerald had elements of homosexuality in them. I make quite a bit of that in my rewrite of *Clothes for a Summer Hotel.*

Have you ever read "A Simple Inquiry" by Hemingway? Well, it's about an Italian officer in the Alps during the First World War. And he's of course deprived of female companion-

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ship. He has an orderly, a very attractive young orderly. He desires the orderly. And he asks the boy, rather bluntly, "Are you interested in girls?" The boy panics for a moment, and says, "Oh, yes, I'm engaged to be married." And the boy goes out of the room, and the Italian officer says, "I wonder if that little sonofabitch was lying?"

The final line in Hemingway's *Islands in the Stream* is one man saying I love you to another. It didn't mean they'd had homosexual relations, although Gertrude Stein intimated that Hemingway had. But does it matter? I don't think it matters.

You know what he said about Fitzgerald? Hemingway said that, "Fitzgerald was pretty. He had a mouth that troubled you when you first met him, and troubled you more later."

Fitzgerald played the female lead in the Princeton Triangle Club, and there's a picture of him as a woman that's more feminine than any woman could look. Fitzgerald never had an affair with anybody but his wife. There was Sheila Graham at the end, but did he sleep with her? I doubt it. Anyway, I don't think the sexuality of writers is all that interesting. It has no effect, I can tell you that. In very few instances does it have any effect on their ability to portray either sex. I am able to write of men as well as women, and I always project myself through whichever sex I'm writing about.

FIDEL CASTRO

I met Castro only once, and that was through Hemingway. The time I met Hemingway was the time I met Castro. I was in Havana during the first year of Castro's regime. Castro would have remained a friend of the United States except for that bastard John Foster Dulles who had this phobia about anything revolutionary. He apparently thought that Mr. Batista—a sadist who tortured students to death—was great fun.

I met Hemingway through Kenneth Tynan at the restaurant Floridita in Havana. Hemingway and I had a very pleasant meeting. He gave us both a letter of introduction to Castro. Hemingway said this was a good revolution. And if Mr. Dulles hadn't alienated Castro, it might have been.

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Castro was a gentleman. An educated man. He introduced me to all the Cuban cabinet. We'd been waiting three hours on the steps for this emergency cabinet meeting to end. When he introduced us, he turned to me and said, "Oh, that *cat*!" and winked. He meant *Cat On a Hot Tin Roof*, of course. I found that very engaging.

JOHN F. KENNEDY

I met President Kennedy through Gore Vidal, at the family estate in Palm Beach before he was President. And then I met him at the White House where he gave a great dinner party for André Malraux and invited all the literary people, the theater people.

John Kennedy was a great gentleman, a really good, gentle man. On the way to see him we were caught in terrible traffic. Gore Vidal isn't a particularly good driver, though he's a good writer at times. So we were an hour late for lunch with Mr. Kennedy, and he acted as if we were on time. His manners were so impeccable, and Jackie was a tremendous charmer, and still is, I presume, although I haven't seen her in a long time.

THE CARTER WHITE HOUSE

The first time I went there was some occasion when the film industry was being honored. At that time the Carters had not yet adjusted themselves to entertaining. He's rather abstemious, Mr. Carter, which is the one major fault I found with him. We were only allowed to have one very small glass of what was purported to be a California chablis. I downed my glass in one swallow, and then tried to figure out how to get some more. All there was was wine. No hard liquor. Nothing. But you could only have one glass. So I got ahold of Sam Spiegel, who is a very portly gentleman, and I said, "Sam, will you stand in front of the table and slip me another glass of wine surreptitiously?" So I hid behind Sam, and he snuck me several small glasses which helped to get me through the evening.

Later, when I went to the White House, the Carters had begun serving champagne. But they never did get around to hard liquor.

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I think Jimmy Carter was a great humanitarian, and his second term might have been wonderful compared to what we got. I thought his human rights concern was right, and I am sorry that our government has abandoned it.

I don't think the big money people wanted Mr. Carter back in. He wasn't pliable enough.

JANE WYMAN

Jane Wyman was in the movie of *The Glass Menagerie*. She married Ronald Reagan. The no-nose girl married the no-brain man!

HOLLYWOOD

Most of my films were subjected to excessive censorship. Which is one of the reasons why I might be interested in seeing *Streetcar* done again as a film by Sidney Lumet, now that Kazan has stopped directing. But I'd have to have a great Stanley, and the only person they've mentioned so far is Sylvester Stallone, and so I'm not paying much attention to this project of remaking *Streetcar* until there's a suitable Stanley, and a really great actress to play Blanche.

In the 1940s I had a glorious time in Hollywood because I was fired almost at once from the project I was working on and they had to continue to pay me. That was in my contract. For six months they had to pay me $250 a week. This was in 1943 when $250 was equivalent to about $1000 now, I would guess. They had to pay me whether I had an assignment or not.

First they put me on *Marriage is a Private Affair* for Lana Turner. Well, they expressed great delight with my dialogue, and I think it was good. But they said, "You give Miss Turner too many multi-syllable words!" So I said, "Well, some words *do* contain more than one syllable!" And Pandro Berman, who loved me very much—Lana Turner just happened to be his girl-friend at the time—he said to me, "Tennessee, Lana can tackle two syllables, but I'm afraid if you go into three you're taxing her vocabulary!"

Then they asked me if I'd like to write a screenplay for a child star, one named Margaret O'Brien. I said, "I'd sooner shoot

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myself!'' By that time I knew I'd get the $250 regardless.

So I lived out in Santa Monica and had a ball until the money ran out.

ELIZABETH TAYLOR

Monty Clift was one of the great tragedies among actors, even more than Marilyn Monroe, I believe. One of the loveliest things about Elizabeth Taylor was her exceptional kindness to him. Many women were very kind to him. Katherine Hepburn. But Elizabeth particularly. She's a very dear person. She's the opposite of her public image. She's not a bitch, even though her life has been a very hell. Thirty-one operations, I believe. Pain and pain. She's so delicate, fragile really.

I saw her in Fort Lauderdale at the opening of Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes*, and she held that stage as if she'd always been a stage actress. But she has a little deficiency of humor. I knew she would catch it, I hoped she would. And she opened so well in Washington that I think she must have caught the humor.

I know you think Lillian Hellman's a somewhat limited playwright. But *Hellman* doesn't think so, does she? No! After the opening, when I saw Liz Taylor could act on stage, there was a huge party, with great imported champagne, the works! The director was seated next to me at my table. He said he had to get up and call Hellman.

I said, ''Well, tell her I want a piece of her royalties!''

So he gave her the message, and came back to the table grinning. ''Hellman said to tell you the check is in the mail!''

She's a funny woman, and a skillful playwright. Several of her plays are enormously skillful.... I've heard she has emphysema. Who *isn't* sick! They're all sick and dying!

WILLIAM INGE

Bill Inge was a tragic person. *Tragic.* The critics treated him very cruelly. They're brutal. I always thought he wrote two wonderful plays. *Come Back Little Sheba* was a brilliant play. That's when I introduced him to Audrey Wood. And then he

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wrote a play in which a kid kills his mother, an enormously brilliant work. *Natural Affection*, or something like that.

I met him in St. Louis. I came back there during the run of *Menagerie* in Chicago, and he interviewed me for a paper called the St. Louis *Star-Times*. He was the drama and music critic for it. He entertained me quite a bit the week I was there. We became friends.

At the end of his life, Barbara Baxley, with whom he attempted to have a heterosexual affair, and who was very, very fond of him, called me and said that Inge was in a desperate situation in California. "He's sleeping with lots of barbiturates under his mattress. He only gets up to drink, and then he goes back to bed."

I said, "He's on a suicide course."

She said, "I know it. He commits himself voluntarily, and then lets himself out the next day."

"Who's he with?"

"His sister," she said. "I want you to call his sister and tell her that she's got to commit him."

So after consulting Maureen Stapleton, who said I should, I did call his sister and she said, "Yes, that's just how it is." She was talking in a whisper. I said, "I can hardly hear you. Why are you whispering like that?"

She answered, "Because I never know whether he's up or down."

I said, "Just listen then. Get him into a hospital. Don't have him commit himself. *You* commit him. Otherwise he's going to kill himself."

Well, a month later in Rome I read a headline in the Rome *Daily American* that Bill Inge was dead. He had asphyxiated himself by running the motor on his car in a closed garage.

Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Hart Crane, Inge...oh, the debris! The *wreckage*! Toward the end of an American writer's life it's just dreadful. Hemingway's last years were a nightmare. He tried to walk into the propeller of a plane. Fitzgerald's end was not much better, although it was less dramatic.... Once they become known, everybody wants a piece of them.

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CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD

I met him in the Forties in California. At the time he was into Vedanta, an Eastern religious thing. He was living in a monastery. They had periods of silence and meditation, you know. The night I met him, through a letter from Lincoln Kirstein, I arrived during one of these silent periods. The monk who opened the door handed me a pencil and paper to write what my business was and who I'd come to see. I wrote "Christopher Isherwood," and they regarded me with considerable suspicion from that point on.

In this big room in the monastery, everyone was sitting in . . . what do they call it? The lotus position? Including Christopher. All strictly observing the vow of silence. I didn't dig the scene.

I suddenly made some reference out loud about the Krishna. I didn't know who the hell he was, I was only trying to break the silence. Christopher got up, and wrote on a piece of paper, "I'll call you tomorrow." He was very polite, and he took me to the door.

He's a superb writer, and I haven't a clue why he went through this period in a monastery. I think it was a period of unhappiness in his life. I think his love affair with Bill Caskie was breaking up, or had broken up, and he had not yet found Don Bachardy. He was intensely lonely. So he went into this monastery that had this vow of silence and poverty.

I found Chris terribly attractive, not so much in a sexual way, but as a person. Charismatic. Brilliant. And one of the greatest gentlemen I've known. So, being attracted to him, I declared myself.

Then I found out that another one of the vows they took in this place was sexual abstinence! Christopher said to me, "Tennessee, it's perfectly all right if I submit *passively* to oral intercourse, but I cannot perform it. I'd be breaking the vow!" I howled with laughter, and so did he. Then we cemented our friendship.

YEVTUSHENKO

What's happened to him? Is he still in favor with the

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Soviets?

When he was last in the States he asked me to have lunch with him. He ordered bottles of Chateau Lafite Rothschild. And the bill was so tremendous it occupied three pages! I was stuck with it, of course. I told him he was a fucking capitalist pig!

He was accompanied by this very fat gourmand of a translator who didn't translate anything. Yevtushenko spoke perfect English and he understood English perfectly. And the alleged translator didn't understand a damn thing except how to eat and drink like a rich capitalist!

I've heard a lot of people speak against Yevtushenko. I don't know how far he can be trusted, but he's charming in his way. If you can afford it.

TRUMAN CAPOTE

I met Truman in 1948, I guess. He'd just published *Other Voices, Other Rooms.* I thought he was quite cute, slim, with this marvelously witty, slightly malicious tongue. I got mad at him after awhile. He said something cruel about Frankie. Frank Merlo, Jack Dunphy, who was Truman's friend, and I, we were all travelling in my Buick Roadmaster convertible. We'd gotten as far as Naples. At a waterfront restaurant in Naples he said something quite cruel, and I said I'm not going on to Ischia with this man. After a couple of days, Frankie talked me into it. And we went anyway.

I never disliked Truman after that, I just realize that he has this impulse to be catty at times. I think it's because he's a little guy who's been picked on a lot, especially when he was growing up. You know, Truman makes the mistake of claiming he was born in New Orleans, and giving interviews, even points out the house he was born in. Everyone knows he was born in Huntsville, Alabama. Everyone in Huntsville claims him. They all know it, it's registered.

Now why does he do such things? I think it's because the poor little man likes mystery, likes to confuse people about himself. Well, Truman's a mythologist, baby, you know that. That's a polite way of saying he does fabricate. I love him too

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much to say he's a liar. That's part of his profession.

MY FUNNIEST ADVENTURE

I was alone in Miami. Frank (Merlo) hadn't arrived yet from New York. I was staying in Miami until he got there and took me to Key West.

It was night, and I was lonely. I walked out onto Biscayne Boulevard. There's a park along there. This young vagrant was lolling on a bench. I think he was mentally retarded, poor child. I struck up a conversation with him. He seemed not too bright, but personable. I said I was alone, would he like to accompany me to my hotel? He said he would. Well, once he got under a street light I saw he'd never be able to go through a hotel lobby because his clothes were so dilapidated. So I suggested that we go out by the pool where I had a cabana.

We got out there, and he suddenly jerked my wallet out of my pocket. I had only seven dollars in it, though. Then he tried to get my wrist watch off. It had a very simple clasp upon it, but he couldn't manage to get it unclasped. Finally he gave up on that. I wasn't frightened at all for some reason. I was wearing a ring with three diamonds and he couldn't get that off either. It was a tight fit. So I said, "Now this is a very silly situation. I've got hundreds of dollars upstairs in my room. You sit down here and rest, and I'll be down in a little while with a large sum of money for you." I'd realized by this time that he was a moron.

Well, I went back to my room in the hotel, locked the door, and went to bed. And at half hour intervals all night, the phone would ring and he'd say, "I'm still waiting!" I finally said, "Baby, go see a doctor. You really think I was coming back down with a hundred dollars for you?" I liked the poor kid by that time.

It's the funniest adventure I ever had. "I'm still waiting!" He might still be.

HUMOR

You know, with advancing age I find humor more and more interesting. Black humor, especially. My present play, the one

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I'm working on (*The Everlasting Ticket*), I call a Gothic comedy. My humor is Gothic in theater. I make some serious, even tragic observations about society, but I make them through the medium of comedy.

THE RICH

My feeling about the rich is not anger, really, but a feeling that they are emotionally restricted. They live in a very narrow, artificial world, like the world of Gloria Vanderbilt, who can be very unpleasant, you know. Or the Oscar de la Rentas, who are the most shocking of all. They are the Madame du Barrys of our time! You mention Oscar de la Renta to me and I turn purple with rage. They are basically very common people, you know. I know where he's from and how he started, and I know all about where she's from, too. Now they think they're the best thing since the invention of the wheel. I find them an outrageous symptom of our society, the shallowness and superficiality, the lack and fear of any depth that characterizes this age, this decade. It appalls me.

The Sixties were a decade of great vitality. The civil rights movement, the movement against war and imperialism. When I said to Gore Vidal "I slept through the Sixties" I was making a bad joke. I was intensely aware of what was going on. Even in the violent ward I read the newspapers avidly. Then we had brave young people fighting against privilege and injustice. Now we have the de la Rentas.

TODAY'S COLLEGE KIDS

They aren't noticeable now. They seem to be totally reactionary, like the rich. The ones I've met rarely seem different from their parents in attitudes and values.

In the Sixties, or even the early Seventies, the kids I met seemed to be in revolt against the mores and social ideas of their parents. It may just be an illusion of mine, but it seems today that the children are frightened of deviating from their parents' way of life and thought. The ME-ME-ME Generation. Selfishness. A complete lack of interest in what's happening in

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the world. No interest in what's going on in El Salvador, this military junta supported by our government that rushes its troops into villages, pulls the peasants out and slaughters them! American kids don't care. In Guatemala, four hundred people a day being slaughtered, although no one mentions it much. Honduras. Don't they care, this generation? We know why Allende was assassinated, and how and why. All Latin America is in strife, and the ME-ME-ME Generation doesn't appear to care.

The Sixties were intensely alive! We were really progressing towards a workable, just society. But then Nixon came along, and everything fell back into its old routine of plutocracy.

LECTURES

I don't give formal lectures, although they call them that. I just give formal readings. Once I went to the University of Tennessee in Knoxville with a prepared lecture. When I got there I discovered I'd left the lecture at home. So I had to get up on stage and improvise, which infuriated the professors. They were outraged! Knoxville, like other academic places, is very reactionary.

THE STATE OF THE CULTURE

Literature has taken a back seat to the television, don't you think? It really has. We don't have a culture anymore that favors the creation of writers, or supports them very well. I mean, serious artists. On Broadway, what they want are cheap comedies and musicals and revivals. It's nearly impossible to get serious work even produced, and then it's lucky to have a run of a week. They knocked Albee's *Lolita* down horribly. I've never read such cruel reviews. But I felt it was a mistake for Albee to do adaptations. He's brilliant doing his own original work. But even so, I think there's a way of expressing one's critical displeasures with a play without being quite so hard, quite so cruel. The critics are literally killing writers.

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REGRETS

Oh God, yes, baby! But I can't think about them now. So many things to regret. But there are, I believe, so very *few* things that one can change in one's life. There are very few acts of volition. I don't believe in individual guilt. I don't think people are responsible for what they do. We are products of circumstances that determine what we do. That's why I think capital punishment's an outrage. But then the population growth and the growth of crime have become so enormous there aren't enough prisons to put people in. Prisons. Killing. Yet I don't believe in individual guilt at all, and sometimes I wonder whether I even believe in collective guilt. And yet I do believe that the intelligent person, the moral individual, must avoid evil and cruelty and dishonesties. One can try to pursue a path of virtue. That remains to us, I hope.

THE NOBEL PRIZE

I'll tell you why I think I haven't gotten it.

I'd heard I'd been nominated for it several times in the Fifties. But then suddenly a scandal happened. This lady, I call her the crepe de Chine Gypsy, went to Stockholm. And she lured me to Stockholm by telling me she was living in a charming little hotel near the waterfront, and that I would have my own suite with a private entrance. And that I would have a fantastic time, if you know what I mean—I was at the height of my fame then—she used my name as an excuse to get all the people around that she'd wanted to meet but had no way of meeting. She later turned out to be a dominatrix! Well, she had all the press there. She was like a field marshal! "You over that way! You over there! You do not approach Mr. Williams until I give you the signal!" Barking out orders. Oh, it was just terrifying. The next morning the newspapers all came out saying Mr. Williams arrived in Stockholm preceded by a very powerful press agent! And my agent in Scandinavia, Lars Schmidt, who married Ingrid Bergman, said, "You know, you've been nominated for the Nobel Prize but now it's finished." The

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scandal was so awful, the press having been abused, and they associated me with this awful woman.

Well, after all, one doesn't *have* to get it. It'd be nice because it's a lot of money, isn't it? I could use that, if I could get it.

CURRENT WORK

I've been busy with the production of the new play, *A House Not Meant To Stand.* The production of a play is for me an event that eclipses everything else, even turning seventy. I love the Goodman Theater, and I'm going to work with them again. We're already making plans to move this play on to the main stage, and to do *Something Cloudy, Something Clear*, about the summer when I met Kip on the Cape, though I've added other characters besides Kip and me.

And I've got an important play, *In Masks Outrageous and Austere*. It's a line of Eleanor Wiley's, from a poem by her. It goes like this: "In masks outrageous and austere/the years go by in single file;/Yet none has merited my fear,/and none has quite escaped my smile."

It happens to fit the play, which has a great deal of poetry in it and yet at the same time the situation is bizarre as hell. It's about the richest woman on earth. Babe Foxworth is her name. She doesn't know where she is. She's been abducted to Canada, on the east coast. But they don't know where they are. A village has been constructed like a movie set to deceive them. Everything is done to confine and deceive them while her husband is being investigated. Babe is really an admirable person, besides her hypersexuality, though that can be admirable. I think it is! It's a torture to her because she's married to a gay husband who's brought along his boyfriends. I think it's an extremely funny play.

ADVICE TO YOUNG PLAYWRIGHTS

What shouldn't you do if you're a young playwright? *Don't*

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bore the audience! I mean, even if you have to resort to totally arbitrary killing on stage, or pointless gunfire, at least it'll catch their attention and keep them awake. Just keep the thing going any way you can.

THE MONEY PEOPLE

Do you know what the most difficult aspect of playwriting is? I'll tell you. *It's dealing with the money people.* The commercial end of it is the most appalling part. The demands for changes and rewrites don't bother me if they're made by the director, and I think they're intelligent demands. But when the money people get into the act, you're in trouble.

MY MOST DIFFICULT PLAY

I think *Clothes For a Summer Hotel* was the most difficult play to write, of all my plays. Because of the documentation I had to do. I had to spend four or five months reading everything there is about Fitzgerald and Zelda. There's a huge amount of material. Finally, when it was written I had to cut an hour out of the play on the road. José Quintero was in very fragile health, and after every opening, he had to flee. So I had to do it without any help or advice from anybody. To cut an hour out of it. And then I had to start rewriting it. The scene the critics objected to most violently was that between Hemingway and Fitzgerald. But that's an integral part of the play because each was a central figure in the life of the other. I thought the confrontation between them indispensable. Now I've rewritten the play again, and I've built up that scene, not so much in length of playing time, but in content, making it more pointed.

ZELDA FITZGERALD

Zelda's one great love affair was with this French aviator. It

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was her first infidelity to Scott, and probably her only one. It was aggressive because she was being liberated by infidelity from this very possessive love that Scott had for her. And for the first time she was experiencing erotic ecstasy. She'd never experienced that with Scott. She used to complain to poor Scott that he was sexually inadequate.

She frightened the aviator by the violence of her reactions. She went around the bend because of him. She tried to kill herself, swallowing the contents of a bottle of morphine or something. The aviator was frightened away.

Zelda was also terribly anti-Semitic, like most Southern women, and a touch of it goes into the play (*Clothes*). I think I just couldn't leave it out and do a true portrait of her. I have her make a single anti-Semitic remark in the play, which is about Sheila Graham whose real name is Lili Sheil.

In the theater you hardly dare use the word Jew, and it's really a detriment to a very fine people that they're so frightened of any criticism whatsoever, although after the Holocaust they certainly have reason to be frightened. I have no feelings of anti-Semitism, but those feelings do exist in other people, and it's difficult to present a picture of the world as it truly is without on occasion allowing a voice to those sentiments.

CHILDREN

I'm very happy I never had any children. There have been too many instances of extreme eccentricity and even lunacy in my family on all four sides for me to want to have children. I think it's fortunate I never did.

Rose, Dakin, and I are the last of two direct blood lines, the Dakin family, and the Williams. And all three of us are childless.

HANDLING LONELINESS

It's not easy. I have a few close friends, though. And you can get by with a few. And as for sex? I don't feel I require it that

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much anymore. I miss having a companion very much. I'll never be without someone with me, although it'll just be someone who is fond of me and takes care of me, but it won't be a sexual thing anymore.

DEATH

Everyone's afraid of it, but I'm no more than most, I suppose. I'm beginning to reconcile myself to it. I'm *not* reconciled to dying before my work is finished, though. I have a very strong will. There were occasions in the last years or so when I might have gone out. But my will forces me to go on because I've got unfinished work.

—Dotson Rader

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Tennessee Williams: A Friendship

Dotson Rader

Two years ago, Frank Fontis, the caretaker of Tennessee Williams' property in Key West, was murdered. It was an especially vicious killing. He was shot at point-blank range late at night in the living quarters of a railroad museum he operated on the island. It was a curious affair.

Frank Fontis was a well-liked, middle-aged queen with no known enemies in the Keys. He was a gardener by trade. Swishy, a bit of a camp, he took great pride in working for Tennessee and in being his friend. And, like Tennessee, he was at times hypochondriacal and loudly self-dramatic. He was also unusually generous, particularly if you were young, pretty and male. That may be the reason he got into such deadly trouble.

In the winter Key West is invaded by young drifters without funds who turn to drug dealing, petty theft, and prostitution to make do. They sleep in battered campers parked along public beaches or in cheap rooming houses; they lounge at night along Duval Street, displaying a mixture of sullen sexual availability and thinly disguised threat, much like hustlers

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everywhere. They are hungry, desperate, on to the game, with eyes open to the easy mark. Frank was just the right sort of pushover to hit, being fat, trusting, defenseless, and homosexual.

So one night that January he was discovered naked and bloodied on the floor by the front door of the tourist-trap he owned. Scattered near his body were several hundred dollars in bills, as if someone had tossed them into the air in glee after blowing his life away.

On the telephone table by his bed was found a single slip of paper. On it was written: "My friend Miss Lillian Carter." Next to her name was her phone number in Plains, Georgia. It was the only phone number in Frank's possession.*

Even stranger was the fact that later that same night, persons unknown broke into Tennessee's house and ransacked the place.

Tennessee Williams was in New York at the time, staying in the apartment he keeps in Manhattan. He was working on "Clothes For A Summer Hotel" with José Quintero, who would direct the play on Broadway.

The morning after Frank's murder**, Tennessee called me and asked me to come to the apartment. When I arrived he was agitated, somewhat despondent, and anxious because he could get no word on the events in Key West. Together we phoned various friends in Key West trying to get a line on the murder and the condition of his house and property. We didn't have much luck. Finally, Tennessee asked me to fly to Key West and stay in his house until he could join me there several days later. I agreed.

Why I agreed was because I loved him. He seemed very forlorn, and at a loss. That has so often been my perception of him since we first met—the sense of unadmitted sadness, an arresting loneliness that is articulated only in his work. And

*This summer, when I visited Miss Lillian in Plains, we talked about Frank Fontis. She was the first person to be notified of his murder. When her phone number was discovered by his bed, the police called the Secret Service, who contacted her to determine the nature of her relationship with the murdered man. She had met Frank only once, when she was in Key West with several women friends the year before. They stopped Frank on the street to ask directions. He invited them to see Tennessee's house. After giving them a tour, he took them to lunch. She never saw him again.

**After Fontis died, the police obtained a court order to open his safe.

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physical vulnerability. Tennessee is much smaller than I am, nearly a foot shorter. And like me, he's had his bouts with booze and drugs and disloyalties, and has survived them. But when you're his friend, it's easy to forget the greatness of his literary achievement, and solely see someone in need of friendship and concern. Tennessee elicits, quite unintentionally, from those around him a desire to protect him. But from what?

Much of my perception is influenced by the environment in which I normally find him. Hotel rooms littered with clothes, pills, manuscripts, piles of mail (largely unopened), books, the ever-present typewriter. Or rented apartments where even the furniture is leased. He seems at home nowhere, except possibly Key West. And yet his curiosity, his sexual or rather *affective* needs are such that he ventures where it isn't safe. I don't simply mean the young men we meet or the various dives and bars he has accompanied me to. I mean his compulsion to travel, to keep in flight, whether alone or with a companion, all over the world in search of a place and someone with whom he can be content. Safe. He told me recently that he had given up sex. All he wanted, he said, was someone to caress on occasion. Someone to be with. Not much to ask, but since the death of Frankie Merlo in 1962 it's been a desire largely unfulfilled.

"As long as Frank was well, I was happy," Tennessee had written. "He had a gift for creating a life and, when he ceased to be alive, I couldn't create a life for myself."

And so he travels. I have helped him pack more times than I have packed myself, I guess. I once asked him why he travels so goddamn much, and he replied, "Baby, it's hard to hit a moving target."

So I went to Key West at his request. I'd frequently been to the island before, usually staying at Tennessee's house, and enjoying it all immensely. Most of what little I know about writing and the discipline it commands, I picked up there from him. It's a splendid place for a writer to work. There are few distractions, unless you find honky-tonk bars or artsy-fartsy shops or the Conch Train Tour your ticket. Even the beaches are small

Inside was a collection of material stolen from Tennessee—playscripts, notebooks, signed editions. From time to time Tennessee used to complain about missing manuscripts, first editions of his work and other things that disappeared with disconcerting regularity. He never suspected Fontis, and the discovery that his friend had been a thief hurt him very much.

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and poor, the surf dead; the restaurants mediocre at best; the sex ungenerous and often diseased. But what Key West has, or had, was quiet, and the finest weather and fishing in the United States.

But now the quiet was broken, and the island found itself in the midst of a crime wave, though a small one to be sure, as crime waves go in America. This one was primarily due to two unrelated factors: drug smuggling and anti-homosexual bigotry.

The smuggling attracted to the island a lot of dangerous types, and it corrupted some of the police. By the time I arrived that winter, out of Key West's normal contingent of twenty-seven cops, only eleven were left, the others having quit or been indicted.

Also, a local Baptist pastor had started a campaign to rid the island of homosexuals, not an easy proposition since they constituted a large percentage of the population. Contrary to popular thinking, Key West has always had a gay colony, mainly because a third of the island is a naval base. Where there's "seafood" (which is how Tennessee refers to sailors) you'll find men to eat it. Anyway, this preacher had taken out a full page ad in the local newspaper calling for vigilante squads to clean the place of sodomites. Not unexpectedly, a certain element of the populace responded with brutal enthusiasm. Males, gay or straight, were assaulted on the streets by gangs of youths swinging lead pipes and bicycle chains; gay-owned businesses were attacked; the atmosphere was decidedly nasty, the future risky.

I stayed at Tennessee's house, which is a small, white, clapboard conch house—bungalow—with three bedrooms, a living room, dining area, and kitchen. There are glass doors that open onto a brick patio. Off the patio is a large swimming pool, surrounded by palm trees and other plants, thickly overgrown. At the end of the swimming pool, near the house, is Tennessee's study, a separate building with a skylight and a bath. Next to it, but separate from it, is the guest cottage, its interior like a ship's cabin. The entire compound is surrounded by a high fence, and protected by lights and alarm systems. There is good

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reason for that.

The night after I arrived, a gang of youths came by the house late, throwing beer cans against the windows, setting off firecrackers, and shouting "Get out of town, cocksuckers!" and other obscenities. I called the cops. They never showed.

I was used to it, but it still bothered me, although it never seemed to bother Tennessee, this ritual of anonymous public insult. The first winter I stayed at his place, I had opened the door in the morning to retrieve the mail and saw three construction workers leaning against the picket fence bordering the front lawn. They were peeing on the yard. When they saw me they shouted vulgarities, and gave me the finger as I retreated into the house. When I complained to Tennessee, he replied, "Baby, it's probably good for the plants." And went swimming.

Several days after I arrived Tennessee and José Quintero flew down. I told Tennessee my fears about our remaining on the island. He wasn't the least bit frightened. He never is.

I said I thought the police were hopeless, and probably corrupt to boot.

He looked disappointedly at me. "You think the police are corrupt now?" he asked. "You should have seen them when I arrived here in the Forties. Then they found a body at the bottom of the bay wearing cement shoes. After they dragged the body from the water, the sheriff looked at the dead man, then he looked at the cement shoes the dead man was wearing, and promptly declared it a suicide!" Tennessee howled with laughter.

A few nights later the two of us were walking down Duval Street, Key West's main drag in every sense of the term. We'd had dinner with José Quintero at a restaurant near the water. It was a lovely warm night, and we were in a good mood, high but not drunk. We sang hymns as we ambled along.

After strolling a few blocks along Duval we spotted five young men sitting on one of the concrete planters on the sidewalk. We approached them. Tennessee explained we were itinerant choristers trying to earn an honest buck and would they care to hear a refrain of a hymn? Not waiting for an answer, we

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burst loudly into a rendition of "I Come To The Garden Alone." I thought we sang pretty good.

As we were singing, the five young men surrounded us, and it was soon apparent they didn't appreciate the music and in fact were up to no good.

I spotted a knife in the hand of the leader of the thugs, a tall, burly fellow in a thickly knitted, turtleneck sweater.

"Let's get the fuck out of here!" I said to Tennessee.

He wasn't about to run.

He glared up at the bear of a man confronting him, looked about at the others, and said, "I have a very good memory. I'll remember your faces tomorrow. So get out of the way!"

They didn't move. Then the big man swung his leg, trying to kick Tennessee in the face. He missed because I pulled Tennessee back.

"Let's go, Tenn!" I pleaded, grabbing his arm.

He gave me a look of withering contempt for my cowardice. And then he turned his attention to the chief bruiser.

"My name is Tennessee Williams!" he declared, "And I am not in the habit of retreating!"

Whereupon they hit *me*!

After knocking me to the ground, they slugged Tennessee, picked him up, threw him on top of me, and gave me some swift kicks in the side for good measure. And it was over.

Later, when I asked him if he had any idea who the bastards were who jumped us, he said, "Baby, they were probably New York drama critics!"

The next day I was able to identify two of the boys from the police mug book. One was the son of a Key West cop. None of the group were ever arrested for their attack on us.

I first met Tennessee in the winter of 1971. I had just published a book, *Government Inspected Meat*, a novel about a male hustler, that he happened to have read. In some of the reviews it was implied that the book was autobiographical.

I ran into him at a party on the Lower East Side.

Tennessee had not been much in the public eye. He had recently gotten out of the booby hatch where his brother, Dakin, had committed him. Tennessee, after the death of

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Frankie Merlo, had fallen to pieces, and the liquor didn't help much and the amphetamine shots from Max Jacobson didn't help much and he was finally put inside. It was a horrible experience for him. He suffered coronaries in the hospital. Worse, he endured loneliness and hopelessness. So, in a strange way, we came together at a time of trouble for both of us. *I'd* just broken up with a lover, and I was having a great deal of difficulty handling the minor success of my book. It had produced more money for me than I'd ever had before. And as a result I was giving it away by the handful. I didn't know what to do with it.

I was still strutting around in blue jeans and a leather jacket, often sporting a cowboy hat, looking like a Sixties midnight cowboy. If there was one redeeming feature to my character at the time, it was that I was deeply involved in the anti-war movement, to which a great deal of my money went.

When I met Tennessee, he asked me how much I made a night.

I thought he was putting me on.

"A hundred bucks," I said. I hadn't the vaguest idea what the going rate was. I was about five times over the mark.

He laughed, and asked me to lunch.

I went to the Plaza the next day. He was writing at his desk. I sat and had a glass of wine while he finished his work. Then he got up, took a shower, and changed into a beige suit. As we left the Plaza Hotel crossing Fifth Avenue toward the restaurant, I noticed that his right sleeve was wet with blood. I was horrified.

I pointed it out to him. He glanced at his sleeve with more annoyance than alarm. He explained to me that often the small capillaries in his arms or legs would spontaneously break and bleed.

He invited me down to Key West that winter. It was a happy time. He was writing well. And painting. He has painted almost as long as he has written. His technique is primitive, but his sense of color is unusually keen and his sense of humor sharp. My favorite painting is one he did years ago that hung in his bedroom. It showed a youth sitting on a bed, a hooker standing in the background waiting to get it on with him. It

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was the boy's first time. In the painting, on the wall over the bed, was a plaque that read: "Good Luck, God!"

That painting is gone, like most of those he's done. In Key West he supports a number of indigent friends by giving them pictures that they sell to dealers on the island. It's a way of dispensing charity without offending the recipient's pride. I was once unable to meet my rent, and Tennessee heard about it. Rather than directly give me money for the rent, he sent me a note saying he felt I was in poor health, ought to swim more, and therefore was enclosing a check to cover membership at the YMCA. It was a large check.

In Key West Tennessee usually got up about six in the morning. I wrote all night. We'd meet in the kitchen, have coffee together, and then I'd hand him what I'd written the night before and go to bed as he left for the studio with a glass of wine in his hand.

Later, over lunch, he'd tell me what he thought of what I'd written, why it was good or bad, and what I might do to make it better. If I were lucky he'd read to me what he had written himself that morning. He's always at work on several things at the same time. Poetry, short stories, plays. And he's continually revising what has already been produced, rarely satisfied.

After lunch we'd swim. He'd take a nap. Then we'd go out for dinner, or have friends by. Day after day it was the same. Years later, wherever in the world I'd see him, the routine never changed. It's the discipline of work and swimming that has kept him alive.

The year after we met Tennessee became increasingly involved in the anti-war movement. I know that people have made light of his political instincts, but they are true and deeply felt. He met a number of activists. We spent evenings with Abbie Hoffman and David Dellinger, and when Dellinger took sick, it was Tennessee who gave him use of his house in Key West and paid his way while he recovered. He also contributed to the defense of Mark Kluz, a young activist facing prison in California for anti-war activities. I think Mark, more than anyone else, affected him, touching his sense of outrage. Kluz was a young steel worker out of Erie, Pennsylvania. I'd

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met him at the last SDS convention in Chicago in 1969, the assembly at which SDS split and died and the Weatherman was born. At this convention of middle and upper class college students affecting working class dress and speech, Mark was, to the best of my knowledge, the only real member of the working class among the thousands of delegates present. We shared a room at the Y. We became friends. He was exceptionally good-looking, possessing a sweetness, an almost feminine passivity that concealed a festering rage. Tennessee took to him at once. When he learned that Mark was facing seven years-to-life in prison for opposition to the war, he did what he could to protect him. But he was beyond protection. Mark was convicted and sent to Vacaville Prison, where they broke him in mind and body, and he was never whole again.

In 1972, Tom Seligson, David Dellinger, Rene Davis and I organized a huge anti-war benefit at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. This event would be the first time Tennessee would speak out publicly against the war. There were a number of rock groups on the program. Finally Tennessee mounted the stage before the high altar. I'll never forget him standing there, lighted by a single spot, nervous, feeling somewhat out-of-place. Very few of the thousands of people present had ever seen him in person, and that night I saw him as if I were seeing him for the first time.

Then he began to speak. He talked about Mark Kluz, using him as a symbol of all the victims of the war. For once the vast audience in the packed Cathedral was hushed.

When he left the platform, I asked him if he'd been nervous. He laughed. "Baby, I've been through other opening nights!"

After Tennessee spoke, Norman Mailer took the platform and talked about the war. Tennessee sat beside me listening. What followed next was the performance of scenes from Norman's play, *Why Are We In Vietnam?*. After listening to ten minutes of the play, Tennessee stood up in a rage. He was offended by the language of the work. He was angry that dirty words had been used in a church, before the altar (his grandfather had been an Episcopal priest). More, his sense of propriety, indeed courtliness, was violated. He walked out.

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Of course, Tennessee is capable of making a disturbance himself. He has a habit of laughing sharply at unexpected moments. I remember during a preview of *The Two Character Play* in Chicago—a poetic and difficult work—Tennessee was sitting in the back of the theater and, as he usually does when watching one of his plays, he was making notes and cackling loudly throughout.

About a half-hour into the first act, a middle-aged couple to our left started going "Shhhh!" every time Tennessee burst into laughter. Soon "Shhhh!" was elevated to "Shut up!" Still he continued to laugh. Finally, the man leaned over and said, "I paid good money to see this play. So quit laughing!"

Tennessee looked at him and said, "Well, I *wrote* this play!"

"Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" the man retorted.

After the show, I asked Tennessee if he'd been bothered by the incident. No, he said.

That same week we went out to dinner at an Italian restaurant he had first visited when *Menagerie* opened in Chicago nearly thirty years before. Tennessee was looking forward to seeing the owner of the place. When we arrived we were met by the owner's son who informed us that his father had died some years before. We ordered pasta with tomato sauce. While we tried to eat, the son, a budding young actor, stood at the table auditioning for Tennessee in a very loud voice. He was doing the role of Stanley from *Streetcar*, gesticulating wildly. Tennessee kept interrupting him and saying, "Thank you, baby. Very nice, but we'd like to eat now." But he was unstoppable. Finally, Tennessee rolled his eyes, rose rather unsteadily to his feet, and moaned, "I can't take it anymore!" He fell forward on top of the pasta, knocking over the table, and landing on the floor amidst a pile of broken dishes and tomato sauce.

I had him carried into a taxi, and off we went back to the hotel, Tennessee laughing all the way.

He laughs at odd moments at the strangest things. And his laughter is both contagious and defensive. The first time I remember him laughing was when we sat together at the bar at

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LaGuardia Airport waiting for his plane to be called. He was off to the Coast to see a friend. I asked him why his trip to the Coast was so urgent.

"He's *dying* of *brain cancer*!" Tennessee said, and then started to laugh. And for reasons inexplicable to me, I laughed along. We sat there through two rounds of drinks howling in amusement as we proceeded to name all the friends we knew who were suffering from one illness or another.

When I think of him I remember his laughter, his quick sense of the absurd. But he is a complex man—a thicket of many conflicting moods and contrary desires; he is stuffed with memory. Stories waiting to be told. Thus his great feeling of urgency, of the shortness of time, a feeling that has haunted him in a kind of panic all his life.

He has told me that when he dies what property he has will be left to support young writers. The house in Key West, he wants to become a retreat where writers can come and work and not have to worry about money.

Several years ago, after dinner, we sat drinking in his suite at the Elysée Hotel, where he often stays in New York. With us was a young actor from California. Tennessee was talking about death, his own, and how he wanted his burial to be. He took a piece of hotel stationery and dictated a codicil to his will, describing a shipboard service that would mark his passing, and, in very great detail, leaving instruction on precisely where in the Gulf of Mexico he wished his body be consigned to the sea. It is to be exactly the spot where Hart Crane jumped to his death.

Sometime later, perhaps a year, both Tennessee and Candy Darling were acting off-Broadway in his play, *Small Craft Warnings*, he playing the doctor, Candy the female lead. When closing night arrived, I met him at the theater. I handed him a poster advertising the play, and asked him to sign it.

After he signed, he then looked at me somewhat suspiciously. "Have you forgotten?" he asked.

I didn't know what he meant.

Then I read the inscription, "To the Big Dot. Bury me at sea. Love, Tennessee."

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Margaret Atwood is a Canadian poet and novelist. Her first book of poems, *The Circle Game*, won the Governor General's Award. At 27 she was the youngest writer to have received the award. Her other collections of poetry include *Power Politics*, *The Animals in That Country*, and *You Are Happy*. Her novels are *Edible Woman*, *Surfacing*, and *Lady Oracle*. The short story, "Bodily Harm," is taken from the new novel of that title, to be published in March 1982 by Simon & Schuster.

Raymond Federman is a bi-lingual novelist, poet, and critic. A co-director of the Fiction Collective, his other books include *Double or Nothing* (Swallow Press, 1971), *Take It or Leave It* (Fiction Collective, 1976), and *The Voice in the Closet* (Coda Press, 1979). *The Twofold Vibration*, from which this selection was made, will appear in the fall of 1982, inaugurating the Indiana University Press fiction series. Mr. Federman teaches in the English Department of the State University of New York at Buffalo.

Dallas Wiebe won the Aga Khan Prize for Fiction in 1978 for his story *Night Flight to Stockholm* (issue #73). His fiction has been published by the Pushcart Press and his novel, *Skyblue the Badass*, was published by Paris Review Editions–Doubleday. He is also a poet, and co-editor of the *Cincinnati Poetry Review*.

POETRY

A noted classicist and translator, **William Arrowsmith** is currently completing a study of the films of Antonioni and a book on the early poetry of T.S. Eliot. He lives in New York.

Lydia Davis is the author of *The Thirteenth Woman and Other Stories* and the forthcoming *Sketches for a Life of Wassilly*. Her latest translations have been three works by the French critic and novelist Maurice Blanchot—*Death Sentence* (Station Hill Press, 1978), *The Madness of the Day*, and *Selected Essays* (both forthcoming this fall from Station Hill Press).

Siri Hustvedt is a graduate student in comparative literature at Columbia University.

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Sandra McPherson's latest book is *The Year of Our Birth* (Ecco Press).

The poems of **Eugenio Montale** published here are taken from Montale's third important collection *La bufera e altro* (*The Storm and Other Things*), 1956, which has recently been translated in its entirety by William Arrowsmith.

John Peech was born in Ithaca, New York, in 1942, and received his Ph.D. in physics from Harvard University. He wrote most of his poems, several of which appeared in the *New Yorker*, while in residence in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and was also a talented musician. He died in 1979.

Danielle Sarréra committed suicide in Paris in 1949, at the age of seventeen. The text printed here is one of three pieces discovered in a school notebook. On its publication in *Le Nouveau Commerce* in Paris in 1976, it was hailed by some French critics as one of the most interesting poetic discoveries of recent years.

Hugh Seidman is the author of *Collecting Evidence* and *Blood Lord*. He currently teaches at the New School in New York City where he lives.

Jonathan Sisson, a native of New England, teaches English at the College of St. Thomas in Minnesota and has recently published poems with New England locales in *Antaeus* and *Appalachia*.

Jean Valentine's last book, *A Messenger*, was published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux in 1979. She teaches at Sarah Lawrence College.

Richard Wilbur's translation of Apollinaire's *"Le pont Mirabeau"* will appear in Paul Auster's anthology of Twentieth Century poetry as translated by American and British poets, to be published by Random House in 1982.

C.K. Williams has recently moved to New York from Paris. His latest book is *With Ignorance* (Houghton Mifflin).

James Wright died in March, 1980. The poems included here will appear in his last volume, *This Journey*, to be published by Random House in the spring of 1982.

INTERVIEW

Jeffrey Bailey won an *Atlantic Monthly* short story contest in 1967. Among the authors he has interviewed are Christopher Isherwood, Gore Vidal, Gavin Lambert, and Anaïs Nin. His work has appeared in *The California Quarterly*, *The Advocate*, and *The New Orleans Review*. He lives in Casablanca, where he is writing a novel and gathering material for a biography of playwright William Inge.

Dotson Rader's most recent novel is *Beau Monde*, published in 1981 by Random House. His other books include *Blood Dues* (Knopf) and *Government Inspected Meat* (McKay), and he is currently at work on a series of articles about Presidential families.

ART

Duncan Hannah was born in Minneapolis in 1952, and lives in New York.

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His paintings and collages have been included in recent exhibitions at P.S.1, and Stefanotti Gallery, New York.

Robert Longo was born in 1953 in Brooklyn, and lives in New York. His drawings and wall reliefs have been exhibited at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston; "Westkunst," Cologne; and Metro Pictures, New York.

Julian Schnabel was born in New York in 1951, and lives in New York. His paintings have been included in the 39th Venice Biennale; the Whitney Museum 1981 Biennial Exhibition; and "Westkunst," Cologne; and in recent one-man exhibitions at Mary Boone Gallery, and Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.

FEATURE

"A Visit to Braque" will be included in *The Second Life of Art: Selected Essays of Eugenio Montale*, translated by **Jonathan Galassi** and to be published in 1982 by The Ecco Press.

Dotson Rader makes his home in Princeton, where daily he prefers to remain undisturbed till noon.

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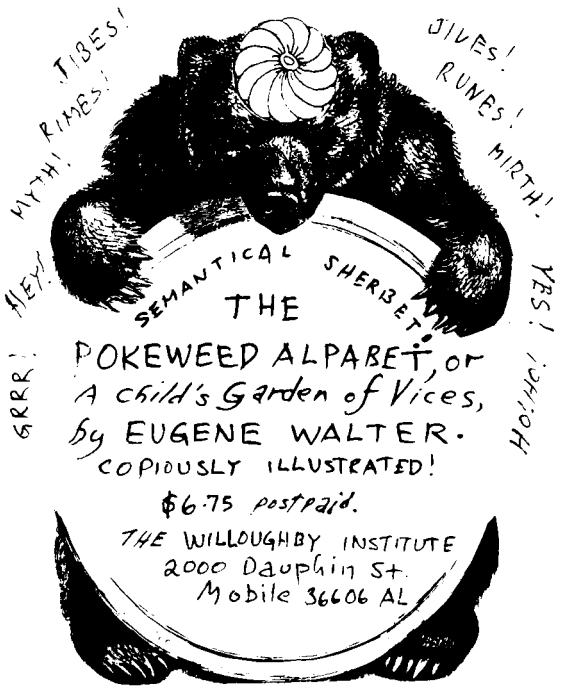

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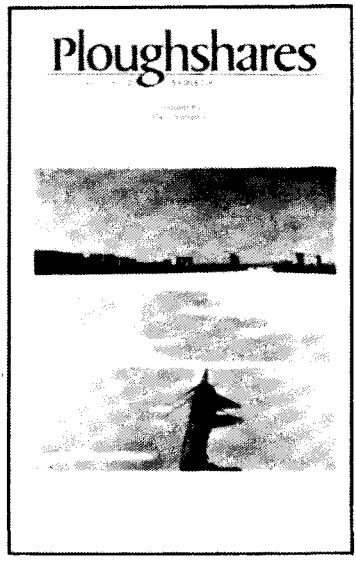

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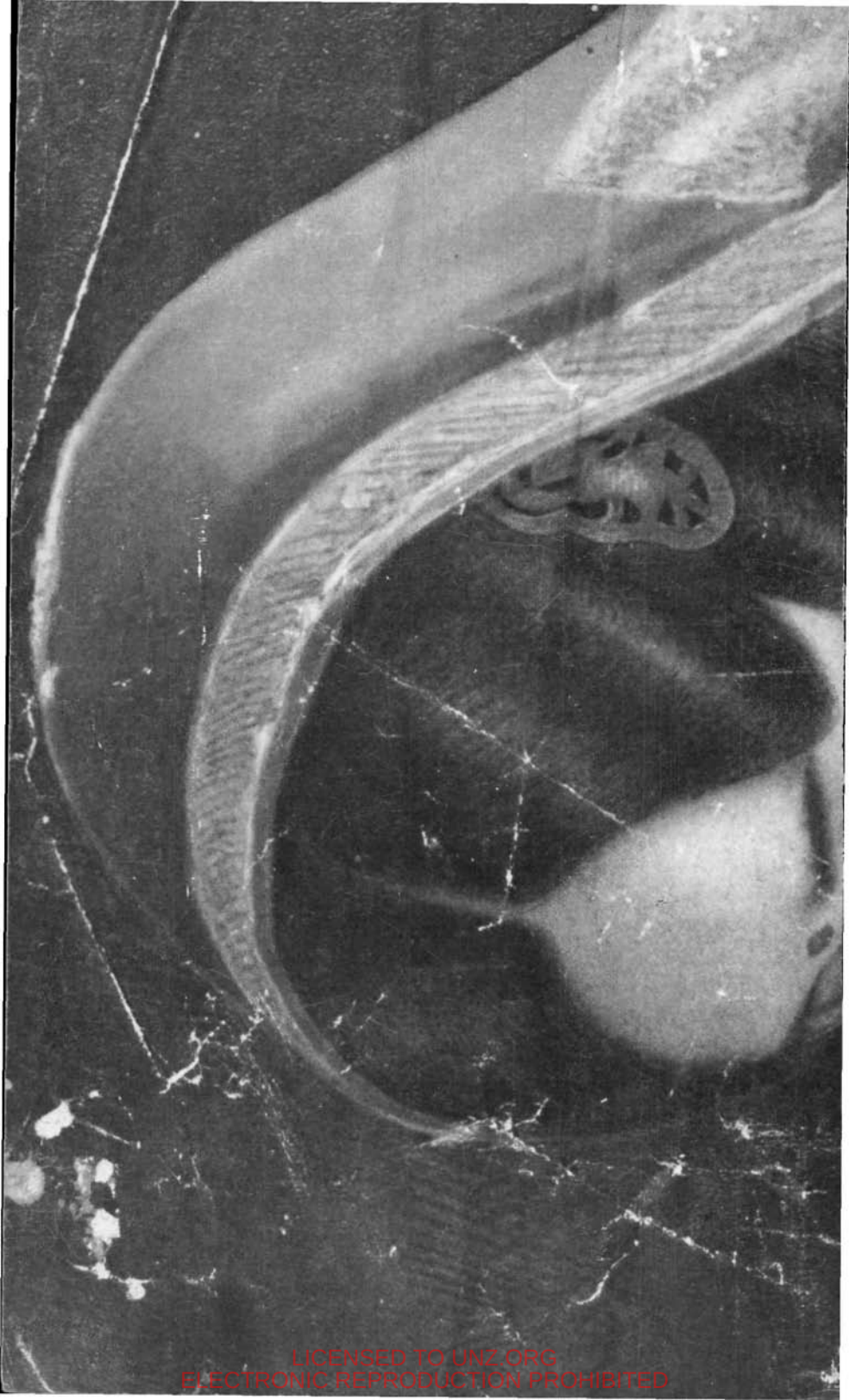
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